

A Life Awry



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A
LIFE
AWRY



“What need to strive with a life awry?

R. BROWNING.

“Possess thyself, and be content.

Life's best is bound not by the utterance
Of any word, nor may in sound be spent,
To win back echoes out of hollow chance.

What thou hast *felt* is thine. If much, rejoice.”

OWEN MEREDITH.

A LIFE AWRY

A Novel

By

PERCIVAL PICKERING

In Three Volumes

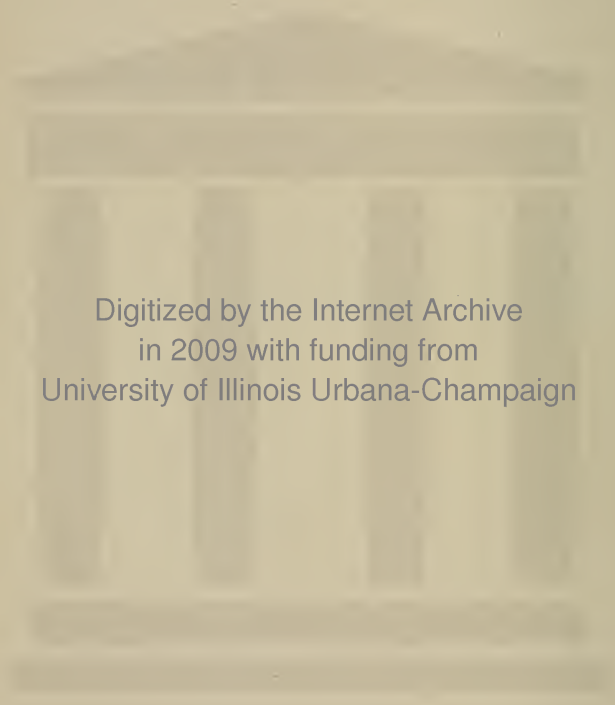
Volume II

LONDON

BLISS, SANDS & FOSTER

CRAVEN STREET, STRAND

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“Shapes of all Sorts and Sizes, great and small,
That stood along the floor and by the wall;
And some loquacious Vessels were; and some
Listen'd perhaps, but never talk'd at all.

“After a momentary silence spake
Some Vessel of a more ungainly make;
‘They sneer at me for leaning all awry:
What did the Hand then of the Potter shake?’”
OMAR KHAYYÁM.

A LIFE AWRY.



CHAPTER I.

JUDY was arranging flowers in her gay sitting-room. Although the weeks had gone by, and summer was passing swiftly, it had as yet diminished little of its pristine glory, and a big fragrant pile of gorgeous carnations and roses lay in confusion at Judy's feet, while she transferred them slowly into great glass bowls in which the clear water sparkled. At intervals she walked to the doorway to study the result of her labours, with her head on one side. The room presented an unusual appearance; some of the furniture had been taken away, and the

rest moved closer to the walls, so that the centre of the room was bare.

A low whistle was heard at the window, and Aline, pushing it open, stepped inside.

"How does this do?" asked Judy, from her post of observation in the doorway.

Aline glanced round.

"Charmingly!" she answered. "I have been seeing to the hall and library; they both look very pretty."

She sauntered across the room and stood with her back to the fireplace, looking about her. Taking off her broad hat, she held it by a long ribbon bow, and swung it backwards and forwards.

"Let me see, how many did we calculate we should be this evening?" asked Judy, seating herself, with a slight air of weariness, upon the sofa.

"About fifteen couples, didn't we say? Thirty dancers, without counting the old fogies. The Daltons muster five, without papa and mamma; there will be four from Cran-

thorpe, Miss Brook from the Vicarage—that makes ten; the three Pups from Ilworth, thirteen; the Billingtons, Harburys, Elkin-tons, and Browns—about eight-and-twenty; Captain Lilcot, Mrs. Heathcote, and myself. It will be thirty, as nearly as we can reckon.”

“Do I count with the old fogies?” asked Judy.

“Nonsense!” said Aline, hurriedly. “I was counting the dancers.” She paused, to move two of the rosebuds in her hat which were displaced, and then continued with a laugh, “How odd it seems to think of a dance at Lilcot! Such a thing has scarcely taken place within the memory of man. I believe Uncle Edward is not quite happy about this little freak—is he, Judy? Doesn’t he think it rather a lapse from the dignity of Lilcot?”

“I don’t think he much cares as long as you enjoy yourselves,” answered Judy, tucking up her feet and lying down.

“I wish he would have done the thing pro-

perly, and have given a ball to celebrate Captain Lilcot's return," said Aline, pouting. "But this is better than the stupid big dinner he thought of; and things got up in a hurry are always fun."

She put her hat on again, and ruffled her hair into a fluffy fringe upon her forehead. Then she pulled her loose bodice down and drew it into neat folds under her belt.

"Where are you going?" asked Judy.

"Oh, just down the park."

"To the lake?" asked Judy.

Aline flushed.

"Why specially to the lake?" she inquired with dignity.

"Merely Hugh is fishing there," said Judy; "and lately you have developed such an interest in fishing, you can't keep away from the water!"

Without vouchsafing any answer, Aline moved to the window and stepped out on to the terrace; then she paused, looked back hesitatingly, and finally returned.

"Judy," she said amiably, "I wish you would tell me something."

Judy turned her head upon the cushion and looked round. Aline was studying the tip of her own little shoe, which peeped from under her pink skirts. She had an air of embarrassment.

"Well?" said Judy.

"I wish you would tell me," said Aline, "does Captain Lilcot know why I came to live here?"

"No."

"You won't say anything about it?"

"No."

"Thank you, Judy."

She waited, as though expecting some further remark from the huddled-up little figure on the sofa. Judy was looking her over with an absent gaze. From head to foot, with soft pink cambric dress and bright little flowers in her hat, Aline suggested the pinkness and freshness of a rosebud. The exquisite face under the white hat was like some delicate China-rose,

the curling velvet lips were like damask petals.

She stood irresolute a moment, then stepped quietly away out on to the terrace.

When she was gone, Judy remained motionless upon the sofa. Her eyes were shut, and she looked as though she were asleep. After a time, she lifted up her hand to brush away a small bright drop which had stolen from under her tightly-closed lids. Then she turned over restlessly, and flung her arm across her face.

Hugh was busy putting on a new pair of white kid gloves. The gas-lamps on either side of the fireplace in the hall shed a brilliant light upon him, and, glancing at his own reflection in the cases of stuffed birds opposite, he was aware that he presented a very commendable appearance. The straight stiff shirt-front was very becoming, the set of his coat was faultless. He felt a satisfactory specimen for his uncle to present to the few representa-

tives of the county who were bidden to inspect him this evening.

Sir Edward was seated in an armchair near, hurriedly devouring the evening papers. Now and then he looked at Hugh over the top of his glasses with a complacent smile. From across the passage, near by, came a murmur of voices interrupted by occasional bursts of merriment. Dick, who had returned to Cranthorpe a few days previously, had brought his two sisters and his younger brother over to dinner at Lilcot.

Judy came hastening into the hall with that curious limp which was noticeable in her walk whenever she moved fast. She wore black, with one yellow rose in her hair and a corresponding bunch on her bodice. Like Hugh, she was at the present time occupied in struggling into a pair of new gloves. But they were long and black, and as she buttoned them over her thin arms they slipped into loose creases. She walked up to Sir Edward, and, seating herself on the arm of his chair

pulled the paper gently out of his hands, and, lifting his glasses off his nose, folded them up.

"There is a carriage coming up the drive, dad; I heard it out of the open window. In two minutes I must march you off into the drawing-room to 'receive' properly!"

"This is the way I am victimized to amuse you young things!" said Sir Edward, smiling benignly.

"As I always tell you, it is very good for you, dad," said Judy, putting her arm round his neck. "It will be great fun to-night—won't it, Hugh?"—appealing to the latter with that oddly childish manner which she assumed at times.

Hugh acquiesced impatiently. He had discovered the first button was coming off one glove, and it gaped in a distressing manner with only the second button fastened.

"So you think you are going to have fun, do you?" repeated Sir Edward, with undisguised delight. "Well! it is a good thing to

be giddy when you are young; you can't work yourself up to the proper pitch of enthusiasm when you're my age!"

"There's the carriage!" exclaimed Judy, springing off his knee as a sound of wheels was heard on the gravel outside. "Come along, dad!" and, as she seized Sir Edward's hand, he made a pretence of using her assistance to help him out of his chair.

In the drawing-room they found the rest of the party sitting in expectation. Maud in a flowing silk of sage green, with magnificent diamonds in her dark hair; her two younger sisters, shorter and plainer editions of herself, in blue tulle dresses which had already done good service at the county balls; Dick, unusually brisk and frivolous, discussing a village cricket-match with his brother—another dark-haired, brown-eyed youth; and Aline near the window, in floating rosy gauze, a rich daring variation upon the delicate rosebud she had resembled in the morning.

"Some one has arrived!" announced Judy in

a stage-whisper. "Good people, put on your company manners!"

A hush fell on the conversation, and the two Miss Thorntons developed an inclination to giggle, which was quickly suppressed by their elder sister. Everybody sat in silent expectation. The next moment Mrs. Dalton was announced and bustled in, followed by her two daughters, her second son, and two of his college friends. Hugh's impression of her was that she was a fat fussy woman in a noisy black silk. She ran round the room greeting everybody effusively, embraced Aline two or three times, and, while a mutual exchange of 'How-d'ye do's' were going on all round, began firing a volley of remarks at Sir Edward. 'What a charming idea this was—an impromptu dance! So *very, very* frisky of dear Sir Edward! The girls had been so delighted when they heard of it! If he could only have *seen* them! It was so sad Fred—her husband—could not come; he had got a tiresome touch of bronchitis from riding in the wet the other day. Men

were so imprudent! She hoped it might be a lesson to him—losing this pleasant evening. And *how* she hoped dear Sir Edward's gout was better?'

Sir Edward listened, amiable, condescending, bored. Hugh walked up to the eldest Miss Dalton—a pale girl in an all-white dress, white pearls round her neck, white jasmine in her hair—and tried to converse. After a few moments he strolled with her into the back room to feel the polished floor. There they could see the Wilsons, just arrived, who, ignoring the footman's suggestion of a cloak-room, were steadily removing their wraps in the hall. They had walked up, and had come prepared for a possible change of weather on their departure, being both provided with mackintoshes, galoshes, and thick white comforters calculated to keep out any degree of cold or damp. Miss Bridge, their niece, a tall angular maiden of severe aspect, emerged from her brown cloth cloak and stroked her smooth hair flatter against her head; then all

three made their way to the drawing-room and were duly announced.

Close upon their arrival followed the Harburys. Mrs. Harbury, pompous, hook-nosed, and bearing upon her capacious bosom the noted Harbury emeralds; her husband, a meek inoffensive little man, who went through life executing capers over his wife's train, and quoting her observations with an air of profound admiration; and Agatha Harbury, well dressed, good-looking, and overwhelmed with a sense of her own importance. Mrs. Harbury announced the welcome fact that her son and a friend were driving over in the brougham, and would arrive shortly; and, while she was explaining to Sir Edward exactly who the friend in question was—how his grandmother had been a school-friend of her mother's, who his father had married, and how much a year he would come in for by-and-by on the death of an uncle, together with many other interesting facts—another ring came at the bell, and shortly after the three Ilworth Pups were

shown in, shy, unfledged, and painfully anxious to appear men of the world wholly at their ease.

One of them shuffled nervously across the room to where Aline stood talking to Frank Dalton, and began begging for a dance, which she vainly tried to evade. Judy pounced upon another, a sandy-haired freckled youth much afflicted with the length of his arms and legs, and piloted him to where Miss Bridge was serenely waiting for some man to be allotted to her. Then there arose a suggestion that enough people were now present to begin dancing. Hugh was sent to stir up the musicians, and soon after an inspiriting polka sounded from the next room. Young men and maidens paired themselves off in hot haste—some satisfied, some secretly wroth with the partner who had fallen to their share—and hurried away to caper as vigorously as though it were mid-winter instead of the dog-days. Aline, her eyes sparkling, her face flushed with a brilliant colour, danced gaily with Frank Dalton ;

Miss Bridge tried to amble in spritely fashion with her red-haired youth, who kept continually getting out of step and asking leave to start afresh; Hugh towed about the stiff Miss Harbury—a fact which her mother noted with extreme satisfaction; one of the blue-tulle Miss Thorntons began tearing round with her brother, the other promptly took possession of the un-annexed Pup. Contentment was visible on the glowing faces of the dancers, despite the fact that they were, for the most part, being subjected to knocks, bruises, and a general course of treatment which, under any other circumstances, they might have resented as insufferable.

Some fresh arrivals appeared in the other drawing-room, and Mrs. Harbury, having generously renounced her claim on Sir Edward's attention, found herself standing near Mrs. Dalton, whose friendship she somewhat affected, pronouncing her to be 'a sensible woman—not quite *crème de la crème*, but very fairly connected on her mother's side.'

“Nice little dance I think it is going to be,” she observed, affably extending a limp hand for Mrs. Dalton’s benefit. “We really hesitated very much about coming. Dear Agatha has had so many balls in town she *all but* objects to the mention of dancing! And then I do dislike a long drive! When one has become used to getting to a ball by going the length of a street or two merely, it spoils one for driving miles to every little country hop. Only we felt it would be *too* unkind to disappoint dear Sir Edward.”

Mrs. Dalton, who did not possess a house in town, and was fully aware that Mrs. Harbury would not have driven a mile out of her way to oblige anybody had it not first suited her own convenience to do so, felt an ungodly desire to point out this fact; but, as the laws of civilized society forbade her doing this to one whose position in the county was so well assured, she quelled the naughty inclination, and instead replied amiably—

“It *does* seem a lot of trouble for nothing,

as my girls observed. To drive eight miles on a dark night, and eight miles back, is most laudable energy on the part of any one, I consider. Though I must say I was agreeably surprised to find a few more people here than I was led to expect there would be. But, don't you agree with me, dear Mrs. Harbury"—she lowered her voice, and glanced round to make sure none of her host's family were within earshot—"don't you agree with me that this is an *odd* proceeding on the part of Sir Edward? Rather a mistake, don't you think? It brings that unfortunate daughter of his into such unnecessary prominence."

Mrs. Harbury nodded her head with the air of an oracle.

"*Very*, I should say, Mrs. Dalton. Some sensible woman really might have represented it to him. It is not like a tenants' dance, or even a big ball which he might give to maintain his proper position in the county; but such an unnecessary little affair. I do not really see what good is to be gained by it.

And, considering that poor girl cannot dance, and is not suited for the position of hostess, it does seem, as you say, bringing her deformity prominently into notice. When I see her moving about, it makes me feel quite——”

“Hush-sh-sh!” whispered Mrs. Dalton, for Judy was passing, making her way across the room to Miss Bridge, whose red-haired youth had just left her in the doorway.

Had Miss Bridge a partner for the next dance? she inquired. Miss Bridge, with a bland smile, replied in the negative. “I don’t know many men here this evening,” she added, with an obviously happy conviction she was stating the sole cause which deterred numbers from being at her feet. Judy proceeded to pounce on a young Mr. Elkinton, who, having but just entered the ball-room, fell an easy victim. He led Miss Bridge away to join in the fray with a fairly resigned expression; and, having ascertained that no other girl was forlornly hoping for a partner, Judy now stepped inside the ball-room, and stood with

her back against the wall to watch the dancers.

A waltz was being played at that moment—a waltz taken from the air of some old hunting-song, with a quaint ringing refrain. The dancers flew swiftly by to its swinging rhythm. Many of them had been sitting for an hour or more before their arrival, and one polka was not sufficient to work off their exuberant energy. They passed like the shifting bits of colour in a kaleidoscope, appearing, slipping away, coming into sight again in the space of a few moments. The scene was gay, for the room was brilliantly lighted, and not too full to spoil the effect of the dancing. Judy tried the old expedient of stopping her ears and watching the dancers without being able to hear the music; then smiled to discover how ridiculous they looked, spinning round and round with inexplicable perseverance. The girls appeared to be clinging to the men in alarm; the faces of the latter seemed to be filled with stern solemnity as they steered quickly from the

couples who charged recklessly towards them. She took her fingers away, and again the music rang loudly in her ears. No sooner could she hear the tune to which the couples before her were moving—could hear their laughter and snatches of their remarks as they passed, than their behaviour seemed suddenly less eccentric, and open to a more cheerful interpretation.

Again and again the refrain rang through the room, crashing out from the piano with an irresistible force and swing. Judy found herself humming it. She beat time with her feet. How differently one couple danced from another! How few seemed to feel the music! Many of them moved so awkwardly and heavily it was aggravating to watch them. Why did they not glide along with that smooth swinging motion which must surely be more easy? Maud moved with a certain languid grace which was charming, and her partner was a fairly good dancer. They seemed the only pair at which it was an actual pleasure to look. Aline also danced well, but at this moment

she had a bad partner and was not to be seen to advantage. Hugh, another good performer, was suffering from the same misfortune. He was waltzing with the all-white Miss Dalton, who, if less stiff than Miss Harbury, had a still more limited conception of the poetry of motion. She bobbed about joyously like a cork in rough water, a style of dancing comically at variance with her washed-out, die-away appearance. Hugh, after vainly trying to accommodate his step to hers, made up his mind to go his own way after his own fashion, and draw her, gently bobbing, after him. But no circumstances could make him appear a bad dancer; he moved swiftly round the room with a firm elastic step, steering well, and keeping in perfect time to the music.

Judy, noting his progress in and out amongst the moving crowd, felt irritated with Miss Dalton. Why could not she dance better? It must be a simple matter with any one who danced like Hugh. She gave a little laugh at the reflection that probably she could have

acquitted herself far more creditably than that bobbing white figure. If only all these people were not looking she would try with Hugh—just once. Supported by his strong arms, moving to the measure of that ringing refrain, it must be almost impossible not to glide with him in perfect harmony.

She closed her eyes and tried to fancy how it would feel going smoothly, dreamily in and out of the dancers she had been watching. Her feet moved to the music; she could feel Hugh's strong arms about her. . . . The waltz went faster; she was whirling round and round. . . . Why had the room grown so hot? She opened her eyes with an expression of pain. The dancers looked blurred masses of colour moving unsteadily hither and thither. One colour was melting dizzily into another. The heat had made her giddy. She staggered through the doorway, and the fresh breeze from an open window blew softly into her face. She walked slowly across the room and seated herself upon a sofa with her back to the ball-room.

Near her was seated Miss Brown, the spinster of means, deeply engaged in conversation with Mr. Wilson, who sat opposite. The words, 'Parochial tea,' 'Mother's meeting,' 'Provident fund,' 'Clothing club,' assailed Judy's ears at intervals, mingling with the hunting refrain. Sir Edward had insisted on inviting Miss Brown, because he said it would amuse her vastly to 'see a bit of dancing.' But her mind was evidently proof against such frivolities. Now the music died away into a soft echo, robbed of all fire and noise. Mr. Wilson's voice gained in proportion.

"What I really endeavoured to convey in that sermon," he was saying, "was the wholesome lesson of unquestioning obedience. It is that terrible spirit of questioning which is the great evil of the age. It pervades all classes. Faith is considered stupidity. People argue now that common sense is the only true inspiration; and common sense enables them to discover all the old landmarks are misleading."

“Ah!”—Miss Brown shook her grey curls with severity—“like the wicked people who try to make out Adam and Eve were monkeys!”

The remark was intended to be sympathetic and profoundly appreciative. Judging by Mr. Wilson's face, it somewhat failed in its design. Now Miss Brown discovered Judy's proximity, and turned her attention in a new direction. Mr. Wilson speedily made good his escape.

The music had stopped. Judy talked fast and laughed a trifle loudly. Miss Brown had begun to retail some of the remarkable sayings and doings of her grand-nephew—a spoilt, objectionable child much worshipped by his relations. Sir Edward appeared at the door of the library, and, in dumb-show, offered a glass of claret-cup brought from the refreshments there. By way of telegraphing a refusal Judy made a face at him, and Miss Brown, catching sight of this, and not understanding the cause, paused at the most thrilling point

of her anecdote to inquire if Miss Lilcot felt ill? Her mind being set at rest on this point, she continued—

“ Well, nothing his mother could do would pacify him. He must have my new cap with those purple ribbons to float in his bath. He wanted to put it upside-down, you know, and set the tin duck inside it. There he sat on the floor refusing to be dressed, and screaming till she thought he would make himself ill. It was no use getting him one of my old caps; he saw there were no ‘wibbons’ directly, and refused to look at it. At last in despair we sent for the cook, who is devoted to him——”

Over the monotonous voice beside her there came to Judy the sound of the dance-music. Another waltz was beginning.

The anecdote still went on—“ Drew this old purple ribbon of hers through a paper boat like a sail, to see if the young gentleman would be satisfied and allow the nurse to dress him. But the worst of a clever child is you can’t take

them in or quiet them as you can a stupid one——”

What was the air of this waltz? It had a plaintive, dreamy melody. At times a voice seemed to come wailing through the music with intolerable sadness.

“How well your cousin dances!” Judy heard Miss Brown saying.

“Terribly—yes!” she replied, with a laugh; and then discovered she had not given the answer which was expected. When had the anecdote of the grand-nephew finished—and how?

She did not attempt to correct her remark, but turned her eyes helplessly towards the ball-room. The couples were twirling round as before, save that the majority were differently paired. Also they seemed to be moving more slowly now; it was not such a quick waltz. Hugh and Aline Graham were dancing together. They moved charmingly in unison; their steps suited to perfection. They passed down the room, gliding in and out of the other couples,

avoiding collisions, swaying lightly to the music with every movement. Aline's head was slightly thrown back; her face was paler, and seemed touched with a sadness caught from the plaintive air of the waltz. Her dress floated about her in a rosy cloud. One soft arm rested on Hugh's shoulder. Somewhere in her hair a bright pin caught the light and flashed.

The dizziness Judy had experienced before still clung to her. Amongst the confused kaleidoscopic colours, a patch of pink stood out with startling vividness. Whichever way she looked, it sprang into sight. She could see it—sometimes clearly, sometimes blurred and indistinct, now glowing brilliant and dark, now paling to a shadowy hue which she failed at first to recognize. Still, as it reappeared with haunting persistency, it floated hazily away, and melted from sight amongst other quivering specks of colour. She passed her hand over her eyes and tried to clear her vision. At the same moment a voice sounded at her elbow.

“Judy,” she heard, “can’t I get you some coffee or anything?”

She looked up with an odd sense of relief. Before her was standing Dick Thornton, with his sensible honest face and shrewd eyes. She rose and put her hand in his arm.

“I will come with you to get some,” she said. “This room is so hot.”

They passed into the hall, where the air was cooler. Supper was ready, though not generally announced, and they made their way to the dining-room.

“Dick,” said Judy, seating herself at the table, “get me some soup, there’s a good creature!”

Dick, having communicated his needs to a waiter, soon set a cup of steaming fluid before her; and then, taking possession of the neighbouring chair, helped himself to mayonnaise, and fell to with that solemnity and steadfastness of purpose which men develop at the sight of food.

Judy, sipping her soup, retailed the scrap of

conversation she had overheard between Mr. Wilson and Miss Brown. Dick paused for an instant in the midst of his supper.

“Miss Brown’s ideas on evolution remind me of the celebrated nigger story,” he said. “‘When God made de furst man,’ explained the nigger preacher, ‘He set him up against de wall to dry.’ ‘Who made de wall?’ cried out one of his congregation, thirsting for knowledge. ‘Turn dat der nigger out,’ said the preacher; ‘such questions as dat ’stroy all de teology in de world!’”

By now a little stream of people were beginning to arrive from the drawing-room. First a few elderly ladies peeped in hesitatingly, then one or two of the dancers. As their eyes fell upon Judy, they advanced more boldly, satisfied they could not be accused of vulgar haste when their host’s daughter was already eating. Judy watched them with keen restless eyes. After a prolonged silence, she turned to her companion.

“I always fancied it was customary for men to talk to their partners,” she said.

"I believe it is."

"Anyway, not to ignore their presence."

"Quite correct."

"Then speak to me."

"Certainly."

"Begin."

Dick opened his mouth to receive a large bit of chicken.

"Well, tell me how you are enjoying yourself this evening," he said.

Judy played with her bread for a moment before she answered.

"Fairly well, on the whole. It is my first ball, and, being such, a novel experience."

"What do you think of it all?"

"That means that I am to talk while you eat! Well, perhaps what strikes me as most odd is that a party of sane grown-up people should collect together to pull each other round and round a stifling room all through the quiet hours of the night."

Dick laughed.

"Looking on at it, I suppose to be forced to

turn round and round perpetually, when one might be peacefully asleep, must appear more like a cunningly-devised method of torture than any possible form of amusement."

"Exactly. If I were a Hottentot, and unacquainted with civilized customs, I should never imagine people in a ball-room were there of their own free will, for their own entertainment."

Dick looked at her with undisguised amusement.

"But," he said, "as it is, believing they are happy, I suppose you share that happiness?"

"By no means!" exclaimed Judy. "People can sympathize with sorrow; I doubt if they ever really sympathize with happiness. When my friends are in a state of bliss and I am not, I merely feel I wish to goodness they would keep out of my way!"

Dick changed his plate for a clean one, and drew a high dish of red trembling jelly towards him. There was a twinkle in his eye.

"You have the greatest aptitude for making

yourself out a fiend of any one I know!" he remarked.

"I believe, if we analyze our natures carefully," said Judy, taking no notice of this interruption, "we should find that we only really enjoy the happiness of others when our own spirits are in a mood to be exhilarated by our surroundings—which reduces us to the position of still enjoying our own light-heartedness, not our neighbour's."

"There is a flaw in your argument," pronounced Dick. "Our own hearts could not grow lighter unless they were first sufficiently unselfish to be influenced by the sight of a happiness which was *not* their own. You must allow for a latent spark of unselfishness there."

"Consider"—Judy smiled a little triumphantly—"if you were enduring tortures of pain so that nothing could make your own heart merry, should you feel any satisfaction in the happiness of a party of merry-makers dancing and laughing before you?"

“I should feel some satisfaction that they did not share my suffering.”

“You would try to persuade yourself it was so—in the abstract. But, in point of fact, your nature would, all unconsciously, cry out against the existence of their happiness in contrast with your misery; while, were they wretched, you would find in that very wretchedness something soothing to your own spirit—you would bear your own pain more stoically, knowing you were no worse off than the rest.”

Dick quaffed off a glass of sparkling champagne and rose from his seat.

“I believe you are right!” he said. “I acknowledge I could love my worst enemy if only he were miserable enough, and hate my best friend if he were obnoxiously happy when I was the reverse! The untrained selfishness of human nature asserts itself over all our fine transcendental nineteenth-century theories. But”—he bowed with mock civility—“I am engaged for this dance, and must forego the pleasure of your society.”

“And the rest of your supper, which is far more necessary to your happiness,” responded Judy, also rising.

“No, strange to say,” answered Dick, as they made their way to the door, “I should place the pleasure of a talk with you quite on the level of a good supper. The fact is, you are not merely another sample of everybody else!”

Several people were making their way in by the drawing-room now, so, thinking it would be quicker, they returned as they had come, along the passage which led through the hall. As they drew near the ball-room, Dick espied his partner waiting forlornly in the doorway.

“There stands my Fate!” he exclaimed, “preparing a string of cutting remarks to salute me with on my arrival. Shall you be all right here, Judy?”

“Oh yes. But, Dick”—she caught his arm as he was hurrying off—“I wanted to ask you, if you have a dance later on, do give it to Miss Bridge.”

“What special spite have you against me?” he asked.

“Nonsense!” whispered back Judy. “Do dance with her. She is so plain, and looks so out of it all.”

Dick groaned.

“What a recommendation! All right; I’ll trot her round when I can.”

“ Mere leaves that fall on yonder wall !
Mere rain dropping down out of yonder tree !
What matter ? If Nature has something to say,
Let her take her own time, let her choose her own way,
So long as at last she will say it to me.

“ Ah ! but leaves will fall as now on the wall,
And rain, as now, drop from out of the tree,
Many, many a day, while the chance, I know,
Is lost ! I have missed what, a moment ago,
The leaves and the rain had confided to me.”

OWEN MEREDITH.

CHAPTER II.

JUDY lingered behind whilst the colloquy between Dick and his partner took place. She saw Dick, plausible and apologetic, accounting for his late arrival, the girl listening, frigidly polite and incredulous. Then they moved away to dance, and she stole slowly on a few paces, when a murmur of voices on her right arrested her attention, and again she paused.

At the end of the hall which she was passing was an alcove, where, on ordinary occasions, stood a large oak chest. At the present time the chest had been removed, and the recess it had occupied was filled with a profusion of palms and tall lilies. On the further side of this alcove, half screened by plants and slender

nodding flowers, were two people, seated on a low settee.

Standing in the shadow, Judy could study them unobserved. The picture before her was worthy her passing attention.

The girl upon the settee was leaning languidly back amongst the soft cushions. One white arm rested upon the blue cushion beside her, the other lay on the dark rose of her ball-dress. Against the dull red dado of the wall behind, her face showed like a pale cameo. The light from the lamps over the fireplace, shining through her hair, changed it into a misty nimbus about her face.

The man seated at her side held a large pink fan like a silken poppy, which he moved slowly to and fro, making the lilies close at hand nod their heads fast and helplessly. His clear-cut features were visible in the gaslight towards which they were turned. He seemed meting out carefully the air which he dispensed from the moving fan, and watching how the faint breeze now ruffled the waves of the girl's fair

hair, now stirred the soft tulle which lay upon her white neck.

The girl's form was half buried in the pale draperies of the settee and the soft big cushions. Her dress lay crushed about her like a crumpled rose-leaf. Against its dark folds her neck and arms looked unnaturally white. The rise and fall of her bosom was marked by the flash of a minute diamond star. She lay very still, speaking but rarely. Sometimes she glanced up at the face which was bending over her. Then she seemed absorbed in the study of her own white arm, lying indented in the cushion beside her; she moved it to look where the blue veins showed beneath the delicate skin, or gazed absently at the bend of the round full wrist and the small shapely hand, with its pink fingers embedded in the silk of the cushion.

The man watched each movement intently. He seemed devouring every detail of the slight form—the curve of the slender waist, the whiteness of the full round throat, the flower-

like beauty of the face above it, the witchery of the great dark eyes. Now he was speaking slowly, earnestly. He was pale, and there was a hungry, drawn look upon his face. The air was heavy with the scent of the lilies. With each movement of the fan they sent forth a fresh wave of odour to wander faintly across the hall to the small dark figure watching unseen in the shadow.

Hugh Lilcot, seated upon that lounge, and apparently lost in the spell of a dream or a pastime which was occupying his whole being, suddenly stirred and glanced uneasily into the darkness which shrouded the small space of passage visible to him from where he sat, as though disturbed by some influence from the keen eyes watching him. Judy slipped noiselessly away near the wall, and re-entered the ball-room.

The greater number of dancers she had watched before had gone away into the supper-room; but a few couples were left, twirling round energetically, and, in the drawing-room

beyond, three chaperons were stoically superintending the evolutions of their daughters and discussing the shortcomings of their neighbours. Sir Edward was nowhere to be seen. He had evidently led away some hungry dame, to regale her with a judicious mixture of viands and politics. Judy stood irresolute. Three courses were open to her. To remain in the ball-room, standing alone against the wall; to wander into the supper-room by herself, and find each person deep in conversation with a partner or some particular friend; or to enter the drawing-room, and spoil the happy unrestrained flow of gossip in which the chaperons were indulging. As she hesitated, the sickly perfume of the lilies seemed to have followed her from the hall; the atmosphere she breathed was still heavy with their scent. Then a draught of fresh night air passed coolly over her. Mechanically she crept to the window, and, unobserved, stepped quietly outside on to the terrace.

After the brilliant light in the ball-room at

first she could distinguish nothing. She felt as though oppressed with sudden and complete blindness. A great blackness enveloped her, through which crept a murmuring wind, stirring amongst her hair and breathing coldly on her bare neck and arms. Gradually the outline of the familiar terrace, flower-beds and trees, grew distinct from the general blackness; the sky separated itself from the darker expanse of earth, revealing an horizon of paler aspect, against which black trees rocked ponderously to and fro. The night inclined to be stormy; no stars were visible; the grey sky was overcast with clouds, the air was soft with the moisture of coming rain.

Judy groped her way cautiously onwards, running her hand along the stonework of the house until her eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, and her surroundings lay duskily defined in shades of black and drab. Then she forsook the guidance of the house and crept slowly down the lawn, avoiding the raised patches of blackness which indicated the

locality of flower-beds, and descending the steps which led from one terrace to another with extreme caution.

The wind blew in her face with a damp clinging breath, and as it chilled her, the languor and fatigue produced by the hot rooms passed away; new life seemed infused into her veins; she trod more quickly and boldly. In the universal gloom there was an overwhelming mystery—terrifying, exhilarating. The murmuring darkness brought with it a strong relief, a wide expansion of spirit. She felt as though flying from a cramping conventional life which had stifled her, away into the glorious solitude of this wild night—the freedom of this wailing, erratic wind.

She reached the great trees at the foot of the lawn and paced along under the black swinging boughs. Here the wind came and went in fitful gusts, disturbing the dead leaves which lay scattered sparsely on the ground, and whirling them boisterously up into her face. Its increased roughness was invigorating; body

and soul felt buoyed up and strengthened. Still she hurried further, awed and entranced. What a curious influence Nature could exercise when one's spirit was wholly passive to her sway! She changed one into something less mundane than one's usual self—an infinitesimal part of some grand Whole; yet one's being seemed to expand rather than contract in having its personality thus submerged. Oh, to become some essence of the night, which might whirl away with that wild fresh wind, and mingle with the darkness and the storm!

She paused at length, and, crouching down upon the root of a tree, glanced about her. An undefinable feeling of isolation stole upon her. Was it not as though some unseen Power had all this while been propelling her along, some force exterior to herself against which rebellion would have been useless? Looking back, she discovered herself to be nearer to the house than she should have supposed, but the loneliness here was intense. The black trees overhead swayed with awe-inspiring solemnity;

the voice of the wind was, at times, indescribably mournful. She leant her head against the rough trunk of the tree and looked up at the space of heavy sky, the rocking boughs, the world of dull quivering leaves. With the overpowering fascination of Nature now came a mingling of dread, an expectation of some shapeless evil.

She shivered, and, for the first time, realized how cold her limbs had grown. Feeling about for her soft black sash, she wrapped it round her neck and the top of her arms. Then again she glanced back at the house. The light from the windows streamed out across the lawn, cutting the darkness sharply in sunder. She could hear the strains of the dance-music, at times, through the louder rush of the wind. Shadows of the people dancing and laughing within crossed and recrossed the light. She resolutely turned away and endeavoured to give herself up once more to the curious fascination she had found so enthralling. But the power to do so seemed suddenly to have

gone from her. The mere physical sense of cold which had asserted itself, had hopelessly banished all the emotions and fancies which had charmed her. From a wild free spirit of the night she had descended into a commonplace, pitiful specimen of humanity, a prey to a keen growing fear.

Then, in a moment, a great horror possessed her.

The darkness became an oppressive pall of solid matter which choked her. She breathed with difficulty. Her heart thumped noisily against her ribs like the tramp of invisible feet approaching over the grass. It seemed to her that the bushes near at hand, bowing and whispering, were shaping themselves into demoniacal forms and nodding heads. She sprang to her feet and looked about her, feebly struggling to reassert her common sense against this unreasoning hysteria. The wind swooped past with a jeering cry, and she tried to laugh in defiance. But the sound of her own voice was unnatural. The laugh did not

seem to have emanated from her own throat, but to have come vaguely out of the darkness, and to have in it a horrible element of the unearthly.

Now she tried to move away from the tree to which she had been clinging, and a conviction came over her that she was powerless to leave it. The Fate which had enticed her out into this grim solitude had rendered her incapable of quitting it. A cold drop descended upon her face, accompanied by a pattering on the leaves overhead. Rain was beginning to fall. She looked back at the house with a fierce misery. Within a stone's throw were people, dancing and making merry in the light and warmth, while she was out here alone in the cold and rain. Aid was so near, and she was so incapable of summoning it. She stretched out her arms to the light, then flung them convulsively round the trunk of the tree. Was there any ghastly meaning to this trick which her fancy had played her? Had she been impelled away from the warmth and shelter of

the house, from the protecting presence of her fellow-creatures, to *die* out here alone in the night and blackness? Had the Supernatural acquired some power over her? Was it Death whose muffled tramp she heard advancing towards her with each heart-beat? . . . Or was she dead already? . . . Her half-jesting conversation with Hugh in the churchyard came back to her with new and terrible meaning. She crouched upon the ground and gave herself up to the throes of a living nightmare.

Was this how the dead feel—coffined into helplessness and silence—into outer darkness? And yonder were the living, the happy living, who rejoiced in warmth and light and fellowship, while she lay forgotten out here in the darkness and cold. The rain was dripping on her grave now; she could hear it, drip, drip, till it touched her ice-cold body. The darkness was pressing upon her; it must be heavy mould which they had shovelled on her coffin; she was voiceless, but even could she cry aloud, no sound could ever penetrate those weighty

layers of earth. The rustling noises which she heard about her must be disembodied spirits revelling in the darkness and jeering at her confined soul. Some day her body would be crumbled and dispersed, then she would perforce join that ghostly crew. A cold substance touched her hand ; it must be a worm crawling between her fingers. She could not move to cast it aside ; it must go on its way. Then, on the breeze, suddenly came the scent of lilies—sickly—overpowering, like the haunting perfume she had smelt in the drawing-room, the desire to escape from which had first driven her forth into the night. Yes ! lilies had been planted over her grave—strong deadly lilies—and she could not thrust them away, nor cry out to petition their removal ; she must lie quiet there while they bloomed triumphantly above her, while their perfume hovered ceaselessly about her, while their roots crept ever nearer and nearer to her defenceless, naked body !

In her horror, cold drops, which were not

rain, stood upon her forehead. With a gasping cry, she raised herself up and staggered to her feet. A desperate resolve was upon her to conquer and escape from this growing fantasy. She gathered all her strength together and fled away towards the house.

Every fibre of her body quivered as she ran. A belief that she was being pursued frenzied her. She was fated never to reach the house alive; it receded before her approach. In the whispering boughs and wailing wind were a million mocking voices; the wet leaves whirled in her face were clammy ghost-fingers clutching at her. She passed from under the black forked trees, and scampered up the first terrace while the rain pelted upon her. . . . Now the second terrace was gained . . . now the third. . . . But she would never reach the last! Her limbs were palsied with fear. She stumbled up the remaining steps and rushed along to the drawing-room window.

Here she paused, panting for breath, and looked fearfully back.

Her heart throbbed sharply, her hair was dishevelled with the wind, the rain lay wet upon her face and arms. She must recover her breath and collect her scattered wits before venturing to enter the ball-room. The spot where she stood was dry, for a projecting ledge above sheltered it from the rain, and though the wind swept along the path in front of her, the house protected her from its cold breath. She shrank back against the wall, and waited, still palpitating.

In the bright light which surrounded her, and the near presence of her fellow-creatures, was a sense of protection and warmth. She could look back at the darkness with a gradual surprise at the absurdity of her unhealthy fears. To bring home to her mind the reality of things mundane, she gazed into the ball-room for a few minutes and watched the dancers, hot and energetic, twirling round as before. The open drawing-room window was behind her, and she could hear the voices of Mrs. Dalton and Mrs. Harbury conversing in its

recess. The familiar tones reassured her. She began smoothing her disordered hair, now glancing into the ball-room, now turning a cautious eye on the darkness, that no unseen terror might still surprise her from its midst.

The voices from the drawing-room sounded in a monotonous undertone.

"That was the reason I brought Frank instead of George to-night," said Mrs. Dalton.

"You were wise. . . ."

"Well, we all know the old story of young men in the country with nothing to do——"

The breeze came past in a wet gust, rattling the gravel on to the stone terrace.

"Designing young person. . . . Entirely out of the question. . . . One does not approve when it comes too near home. . . . Clear to all save those concerned what course events are taking to-night."

Swish—patter—rattle. Judy's skirts outspread in a gust of air, then twined closely about her.

Now the wind sank.

“*I say, Sir Edward has no one but himself to thank for whatever occurs. How he can shut his eyes to the folly of having that girl here at all! Under any circumstances it is a great mistake not to keep events of that kind entirely in the background, but she is essentially not a person to pass unnoticed.*”

“If Sir Edward has little enough common sense, from what I hear, some one else is gifted with a fair amount. Do you know the girl is going to be removed to some of her so-called relations at Edinburgh, very shortly, before much mischief can be done? Some one has her wits about her, you see!”

“No, really”—Mrs. Dalton’s voice sank a semi-tone lower from excitement—“you don’t mean to say——”

Judy shook her sash from her shoulders and stroked it down the side of her dress. She looked back at the night.

“I am satisfied of the presence of things mundane!” she announced gravely; and she re-entered the ball-room.

“I thought by token of thy matchless form
To curb thy will, and make thee mine indeed
From head to foot. There is no other creed
For men and maids in safety or in storm
Than this of love. Repentance may be warm,
But love is best, though broken like a reed.”

ERIC MCKAY.

CHAPTER III.

THE morning after the dance Maud Heathcote was to leave Lilcot to join her husband for a ten days' shooting-party in Scotland, from whence she intended returning to her home in London before paying visits in the south.

The carriage was already at the door when she came hurrying into Judy's room to bid her good-bye. The shutters were closed over each of the three long windows, and she had to grope her way through darkness to the side of the big bed.

"Open the shutter a bit, Maud," said a voice from beneath an eiderdown coverlet; and, as she proceeded to follow this suggestion, the light of a sunny morning streamed into the room, and shone across the tumbled bed, where

lay a small white-robed figure with its arms extended outside the sheets.

"I thought you would have come sooner," said Judy, in an injured voice. "I wasn't asleep."

"Dear, I am so sorry!" said Maud, busy arranging her cuffs in the sleeves of her tweed travelling dress. "I meant to have come long ago for a talk, but I overslept myself, and had only just time to scramble into some clothes and swallow some breakfast. However, you must write often and tell me all the news. I wish you could be persuaded to come and pay me a visit in London."

Judy shook her head emphatically.

"What would you do with me in London? I should wish myself at the antipodes when strangers arrived and wondered where you had picked me up."

"Will you come in September, before people come back to town?" inquired Maud, reflecting that one of her visits could be postponed. "We could amuse ourselves very well."

“No, I am best here,” answered Judy, rather ungraciously; “only come and see us again as soon as you can.” She propped herself up amongst her large pillows, and put her arm round Maud’s neck. “I wish you were not going!” she said, with sudden wistfulness.

Was there something of appeal in the remark? Maud looked at her questioningly.

“Would you like me to put off going for a day, dear?” she asked.

“Nonsense!” said Judy, half angrily, unclasping her arms and sinking back amongst the pillows. “I’m always sorry when you leave. What good would it do to postpone it a day?”

But Maud still looked at her doubtfully.

“Judy,” she said at length, “my compliments are apt to be outspoken. I always admire you greatly; but there are times when your pluck is simply—simply hateful!”

She bent down to give her a farewell kiss; and, a moment later, hurried away, haunted

by the recollection of a white wistful face, and big weary eyes.

Judy, left alone, moved restlessly in the big bed. She had forgotten to ask that the shutter might be closed again, and the sun shone brightly upon her. Her head was throbbing, and the light hurt her. Every power of thought and feeling was swallowed up in an all-consuming weariness. Her limbs grew alternately hot and cold with the feverishness of fatigue. Her back ached as though it were being hacked with blunt knives; a deadly sense of nausea was produced by the pain.

Near her bed stood a long glass. She could see herself lying there, a white-clad, white-faced figure, the outline of her form in the bedclothes small and insignificant as that of a child. A vague surprise came to her that such a small frame should be capable of such acute suffering. She tossed off the coverlet and blankets, and viewed the reflection of her white-robed body with sudden commiseration and wonder. How could such a world of pain be comprised in

so pitiful an amount of human flesh? Poor little body! looking so quiet and painless in the glass, yet with all its sensitive nerves tingling with anguish, its brain exhausted and numb, all its complex organism engaged in a grim tussle with an enemy it could never subdue or escape.

She held her head and tried to reflect. Surely it must be possible, by strength of will and brain-power, to subdue pain and argue it into nothingness? Why should Matter conquer Spirit? Why was suffering to dull one's faculties, to annihilate one's identity? It must be only weak fools who thus succumb! With sudden determination she raised herself up in bed, and catching up her dressing-gown, which hung over a chair within reach, began slowly putting it on with a forced smile.

It was not difficult, after all, to subdue pain. Resolution alone was needed; nerves must submit to the dictates of a strong will. She could feel nothing, she told herself—nothing.

But the self-deceit could not last. In a few moments the smile waned; she clasped the folds of the flannel more listlessly about her; then, sinking back, she buried her face in the pillows with a sob of hopelessness—a prey to that cringing terror of physical suffering which highly-strung nervous natures alone can experience. Why struggle, only to know one's self more contemptibly defeated?

After a time a tap came at the door. She heard it with a certain relief. Some one had come who would close the shutter and keep out that terrible glare of sunlight which was making her eyes ache and her head throb insufferably. She looked up and saw Aline enter—Aline, cool and white in a spotless serge, a bunch of pink carnations in the soft lace at her neck, her face smiling, her eyes bright.

“How are you to-day, Judy?” she inquired.

“All right,” answered a muffled voice from beneath the eiderdown coverlet.

“Mrs. Heathcote told me you were awake

when she went away, so I thought I had better peep in."

"If you fasten that shutter I think I might go to sleep again."

It was scarcely a pressing invitation to stay.

"Lazy thing!" said Aline, smilingly making her way to the window. "What a success it was last night! Don't you think so?"

"Yes."

"People stayed so late, and seemed to enjoy themselves so thoroughly, I thought."

"Yes."

"One thing annoyed me"—Aline stood playing with the bar of the shutter—"Mrs. Dalton is so absurd! Just imagine! she did every mortal thing she could think of last night to prevent George coming! Frank Dalton told me so. Merely because he trotted about after me when I was staying there."

"Oh!"

"He was very devoted, and all that sort of thing, you know, and I suppose it vexed her dreadfully. However, I paid her out, for

Frank trotted at my heels the whole evening ; and Frank, though not so sacred as an elder son from a matrimonial point of view, is, nevertheless, the apple of his mother's eye. I should have waltzed more with him, only Hugh is such a perfect dancer."

The eiderdown stirred, and another monosyllable came from beneath it, this time with more emphasis—

"*Hugh ?*"

"Why not 'Hugh'?" asked Aline, with affected carelessness. "The case is very simple. He told me that, as we were cousins, and as I called Sir Edward 'uncle,' it was absurd to continue calling him 'Captain Lilcot,' and the sooner I substituted 'Hugh' the better. I could offer no reasonable excuse for refusing, could I?"

"I was not asking for any explanation," said Judy. "It is scarcely an important matter to me, or to any one else, what you call him."

Aline looked into the garden below, and played an imaginary waltz on the window-

pane. She resembled a flower again to-day. The white simplicity of her dress seemed suggestive of some pale exotic blossom. Slowly the eiderdown was moved aside, and Judy's head rose a few inches from the pillow. She viewed Aline critically. That white dainty figure recalled curiously to her mind one of the lilies which had so tormented her disordered fancy the evening before. They were just so slender, of just such delicate purity. Aline's hair was the yellow powdery heart ; her white draperies, the smooth clear petals. And the fanciful resemblance was further increased by the knowledge that something, too, of the fragrance of a flower had stolen with her into the closed room—a faint perfume assailed Judy's senses, reconjuring, with unpleasant vividness, the nightmare of her nocturnal wanderings. The scent of the freshly-gathered carnations which Aline wore, came to her as a sickly odour which irritated her nerves and increased the nausea from which she was suffering. A wave of heat swept over her body as the blood

rushed back to her heart, heralding an attack of faintness.

"Nellie," she said with an effort, "I shall not get to sleep if I once begin to talk. I think you had better leave me now."

Aline shook her head at such brazen avowal of laziness.

"Very well; but it is past eleven now," she answered; "though you may not think it, you have had your full night's rest. If I were you, I would get up to enjoy to-day, and have my sleep out to-morrow, which probably won't be half so fine."

She closed the shutter after considerable fumbling, and made her way to the door.

Once outside the room, she ran lightly along the passage. She had done her duty, and it was an untold relief to escape from a close darkened room and the sight of a white joyless little face, which seemed, in its oppressive weariness, to contain some element of reproach. That Judy was knocked up after last night's little entertainment was evident, and that she, Aline,

had been the moving instrument in persuading Hugh to bring about that entertainment, was a thought which gave her a momentary pang of uneasiness, and which she hurriedly dismissed. Was not Judy always ready to fancy herself unable to do anything the least out of the ordinary? And was it not sad that she should not rouse herself sometimes and struggle against this increasing inability to stand any exertion, which surely was more than half imaginary?

Running down the broad staircase, Aline was greeted by a whiff of sweet-scented air blowing in at the open hall door. She took a large shady hat off a peg in the wall and hurried out of the house. A burning wave of sunshine blazed upon her. Pausing to breathe its delicious warmth, she let it kiss her cheeks, her hands, her neck, and fill her body with the glow of its life-giving power. The air which came to her, blowing over the flower-beds, was a compound of the sweet scents of summer—an essence of newly-mown grass and flowers and pinewoods, warm with sunshine.

Strolling towards the flowers, she began gathering some of the roses twined up the handle of the basket-beds; delicate creamy buds just showing the yellow-shaded curve of their petals, vivid damask blossoms with gorgeous velvet leaves, pink blossoms with pale shell-like centres. Some she placed at her waist, some with the carnations amongst the soft lace which fell from around her throat, and the rest she twisted in her hat, drawing the stalks through the holes of the plaited straw till they were secure, and piling the flowers together in careless confusion. Now she began wandering from bed to bed, gathering any flower which took her fancy—drooping red-and-white fuchsias, sky-blue lobelias, mignonette, purple-and-gold pansies, yellow bag-shaped calceolarias. First she shook out the dew which still lay concealed in the shady recesses of their petals, and the tiny beetles who had made their home there; then she added them carefully to the wreath in her hat, or to the posies at her throat and waist. Here and there she disturbed

a heavy plodding bee, too deep in his morning's work to discover that the blossom whose sweetness he was culling had journeyed mysteriously up into the air ; or a flippant butterfly, greedily sucking its morning's repast, and who fluttered away like some portion of the flower detached sharply from its stem.

After a time she found it impossible to add to the flowers she had already gathered without destroying their lightness and grace, or crushing their delicate petals too closely together ; so, with a last look at her hat with its quaint garland, she placed it on her head, and ruffled her hair over her forehead in the way which she knew instinctively made her soft pink-and-white face look its prettiest. A sudden desire to view the result of her labours made her hesitate whether she should not run back to the house and take a stealthy peep at her reflection in the Venetian mirror over the dining-room fireplace ; but on second thoughts she concluded it was too hot for any unnecessary exertion, and contented herself with a lengthy

glance in one of the side windows of the house. The dim vision of her white form decked and garlanded with the many-coloured blossoms, was charming; her face, with its setting of shining hair, was like a fairer blossom in an aureole of sunlight.

She turned away at length, and, leaving the flower-beds, wandered aimlessly from the house. It was a day which she felt gave her a keen appreciation for this strange gift of existence, which has been bestowed upon us so blindly, so fatefully, yet is withal so goodly and pleasant. There was a strength of colour and light in the world. Every hue, every sense to which Nature gave expression, was vivid with identity. The gorgeousness of the flowers, the perfumed air, the sharpness of the light and shade, all teemed with a force which made itself appreciable. To-day, Nature was actively and definitely agreeable; her unsavoury side was emphatically concealed.

Aline passed over the smooth turf, the dappled light and shade trembling upon her

white figure. She felt a gladness at heart for her own beauty. She was in harmony with this bright sunny world, with this exquisite fairness of Nature. To the brilliancy of the sunshine, the lightness of the air, the pleasant stir and murmur of insect-life, she found added a new and more subtle spell. For all Nature seemed vying with her in the expression of beauty, joying with her in the gladness of being, absorbing with her the fulness of life.

She paused soon beneath the very tree where Judy had crouched the night before in paralyzed terror. Now the rugged old oak looked tender and smiling in the sunlight. She gazed up into its branches thoughtfully: a blackbird was singing there with clear thrilling notes. Then suddenly, with a change of purpose, she turned and began retracing her steps.

It had occurred to her that a visit to the gooseberry bushes would be agreeable. That the kitchen-garden being at some distance, and that, to arrive there, would necessitate her crossing the greater part of the pleasure-

ground, and so enable her to ascertain whether any other inmate of the house was abroad enjoying the freshness of the morning—was a consideration she would not acknowledge to herself had influenced her movements. Likewise Hugh, meditatively smoking his cigar on the other side of the house, would not have admitted that his need for an early smoke had arisen out of a secret hope that, pacing to and fro in the sunny garden, he might sooner or later encounter Miss Graham. Thus, when they mutually espied each other advancing from opposite sides of the lawn, the possibility of such a contingency did not seem to have occurred to either of them, and they both exhibited every symptom of surprise at such an unforeseen event. Aline started, and seemed burdened with a desire to effect her escape while there was yet time. Hugh, looking unaccountably confused, took his cigar out of his mouth, and stared at it fixedly while he knocked off the ashes, as though this were an operation which required his whole attention

and prevented his consciousness of any other matter. On second thoughts, however, they both resigned themselves with singularly good grace to the inevitable, and strolled towards each other; Aline with an amiable smile, Hugh tugging his tawny moustache complacently.

As Hugh drew near and extended his hand in commonplace friendly greeting, a delight at which he was himself startled made itself sensible, and found unconscious expression in his face. But Aline seemed unaware of any warmth with which his welcome was suffused. She evinced a shy and artless pleasure at seeing him, and casually announced the destination for which she was bound. Hugh immediately discovered himself to be suffering from a thirst which he had a curious conviction gooseberries would quench more efficiently than a brandy-and-soda, and requested permission to accompany her. The permission was given hesitatingly, and they forthwith crossed the lawn together, each under the happy delusion that

the other had not seen through the transparent little manœuvres employed to conceal still more transparent feelings.

A crimson rose fell from Aline's waist. Hugh picked it up and pressed it lightly to his lips.

"Of what is a rose emblematic?" he exclaimed pointedly. "See—this is a gift from you which I treasure!" And he placed it in an inner pocket of his coat.

Aline stretched out her hand with a pretty pretence of anger.

"Give me back the flower!" she demanded authoritatively. "It was no gift of mine. You cannot keep it!"

"Then it was the gift of Fate," announced Hugh, triumphantly, "and I look upon it as a good omen. Nothing shall induce me to part with it!" and he held his hand over the pocket where the rose was placed, as though to guard it from any possibility of attack.

"Give it back to me!" insisted Aline, with a gesture of impatience.

"What, fling my luck back in Fortune's

face? Is it likely?" asked Hugh, watching her, fascinated and amused. Her pouting lips looked as full and red as the flower she had lost.

"I am angry with you!" reiterated Aline, genuinely vexed. A brilliant colour dyed her cheeks, and her eyes looked dangerously bright.

Hugh felt an inane desire to seize the little hand she was still extending so temptingly towards him—to let it lie, soft and tiny, in his great strong grasp, and feel its helpless wrathful struggles to get free.

Perhaps Aline read something of this danger in his eyes, for she suddenly lowered her hand and assumed an air of indifference.

"Keep the stupid bud, if you think it worth arguing over such a trifle," she remarked coldly; and began rearranging the flowers in her dress, that the gap made by the missing rose might be covered over.

Hugh felt instantly restored to his senses. What a mercy, he reflected, that he had not given way to a silly impulse and been betrayed into the action of a cad! In nothing, he con-

sidered, was the line between the man who was a gentleman and the man who was not, so clearly defined as in flirtation. The ambiguous flirting of soft tones, tender glances, and chivalrous devotion was admissible, but to offer the faintest impertinence to a girl who had in no way afforded any excuse for it, was unpardonable. He pulled himself together and determined to be on his guard against any recurrence of such folly.

Aline, in the mean time, glanced nervously up at the house, then moved on. Had they been disturbing Judy? They had paused directly under her windows, one of which was open, though the shutter beyond was closed. In the stillness it was possible their voices might penetrate to her room.

They left the wide black shadow of the house and passed between the great rhododendron bushes. Hugh drew his hat low upon his forehead to shade his eyes from the sun, and, flinging away the short end of his cigar, gave a sigh of lazy content. To the best of his

knowledge, the idea paramount in his mind at that moment was a keen appreciation of country life. Human judgment is fickle as a weathercock, and veers in accordance with the atmosphere in which it may be placed: the very mode of existence which he had a few days before adjudged so dull and monotonous, now seemed to him charming in its very peacefulness. What could be more satisfying than the repose of this quiet old garden? What more ideal than the freedom from restraint and conventionalities possible in country life? Though he did not trouble himself to seek the keynote to his present content, he dimly recognized that a certain spice of flirtation gave point to what might otherwise have been enjoyment of a rather colourless order. When were not man and maid alive to the curious pleasure of each other's society? And the brightness and gladness of Nature was conducive to a little playful sentiment. Basking lazily in this hot sunshine gave rise to a real need for some poetry of one's own creation, while, in response

to this necessity for a passing romance, had come a girl, sufficiently pretty to satisfy the most fastidious taste, and who, to a certain charming artlessness of manner, evidently united a convenient knowledge of the world, which removed all scruples concerning the danger of a little love-making, or fear of her viewing it in a more serious light than was intended.

It happens that the actors in each little romance invariably fail to grasp the fact that their individual feelings may not be mutual. To one of the twain who may be flirting it will seem impossible that the other may all the while be indulging in the weak folly of love; while to one in the misery of a passion which is genuine it will seem incredible that the tender glances, the soft tones, the devotion of the other, may be merely part of what will then appear a system of heartless deception. Hugh would have, at any time, considered a girl with whom he flirted blamable had he discovered she did not share precisely the

feelings with which he regarded her, to precisely the same degree. If she developed more affection for him than he was desirous she should do, he would have felt that her conduct actually jarred upon his sense of refinement; while if she failed to respond to any affection he had in sincerity offered, he would have probably considered her behaviour still more reprehensible, and that he had been treated with heartless cruelty. It was, perhaps, with an equal absence of logic that, in the present instance, he assured himself he had discovered Aline Graham to be supremely sensible, and able to enter into the spirit of a flirtation with as much zest, and as little seriousness, as himself, so that what was play on both sides must needs be harmless. It was pleasant to feel they were both amusing themselves; that, though she was evidently as *épris* with his society as he was with hers, she was in this merely filling the part assigned to her in the romance at which they both were playing, and that—since she could not misinterpret his character

in the play—neither could she develop one iota more feeling than it was convenient she should have, and no awkwardness would ever be likely to accrue from her charming blushes, her bewildering eyes, or her shy coquettish glances, which sent the hot blood tingling pleasantly through his veins.

They turned into the kitchen-garden, and the red gravel upon the neat paths crunched beneath the light tramp of their feet. The sun poured down here in the full strength of noontide heat, untempered by any pretence of shade, while the brick walls, baked through with its rays, reflected an additional warmth. Hugh looked thoughtfully at the peaches ripening in the twofold heat.

“Aren’t those better than gooseberries?” he suggested.

“Gooseberries first and a peach afterwards, I propose,” said Aline, making her way to the bushes. “If you eat your peach first you can’t appreciate your gooseberries. This way you can enjoy both.”

Hugh laughed, and strode forwards to assist in raising the edge of the net.

“I suppose, as usual, the best bushes are those most difficult to get at?” he observed.

“Yes,” she answered, taking off her hat and creeping along under the net; “and, what is worse, gooseberries are growing scarce now, and one has to hunt further! But luckily these are rather tall bushes, which makes it easier. Still, it is very back-achy work!”

Hugh crept after her up the narrow prickly avenue. Soon she paused, and, gathering her white skirts carefully round her, crouched down in front of a bush.

“Here are some beauties!” she announced. “I think you can trust me to know where to find the best that are still to be had!”

Thrusting her small hand cautiously amongst the thorny branches, she began gathering the ripe fruit and conveying it eagerly to her mouth. Hugh hastened to join her, and for the next few minutes they both continued to pluck and eat in profound silence.

Soon, however, Hugh became restless. He fidgeted first on to one leg, then on to another ; finally he rose up with the net drawn tightly over his back.

“This is very pleasant,” he announced, “but it is not unalloyed bliss. I shall get cramp shortly. What a pity we can’t sit down and do the thing comfortably ! ”

“Impossible ! ” said Aline, with an expressive glance at her white dress.

“Yes, but I see a bit of matting yonder,” he replied. “It looks clean. I will go and fetch it.”

He crept cautiously away through the bushes, the branches first hooking themselves into his coat, and then rebounding with a jerk as he passed on. Soon he made his way back, carrying a square piece of matting about a yard wide.

“This will do famously,” he said, spreading it on the earth. “Now sit down, and see if you are not more comfortable.”

Aline, with her hands full of fruit, rose up,

and, stepping over the matting, seated herself upon it as he suggested, and nodded to him a smiling approval.

“A great improvement,” she pronounced. “Just try it; there is plenty of room for you.”

She motioned with her hand for him to sit beside her, and Hugh, who had been speculating whether she would consider the matting large enough for two, lost no time in profiting by her invitation.

“Now you can eat all round you,” he observed, as he let himself slowly down on to it and stretched out his legs. “When you have cleared all the bushes within reach let me know, and we will move on!”

“How business-like!” exclaimed Aline. “Speak for yourself! You will do more towards clearing the bushes than I shall.”

“Possibly!” he acknowledged. “I am so comfortable I am perfectly contented to remain here till luncheon-time, and if I remain seated in front of a gooseberry bush I must needs eat!”

“In fact, one is thankful for even the

shade of a twig to-day," remarked Aline; "but the position feels original!"

They both laughed. They were completely hidden where they sat. The kitchen-garden was empty, but even had any one passed along the paths they could not have espied so much as the top of Hugh's hat or the gleam of Aline's white dress. Sitting thus on the ground, the shade was sufficient to screen them from the glare of the sun. They attacked the gooseberry bush in turns. The matting was so small that neither of them could move without brushing against the other.

Hugh, in spite of Aline's prediction to the contrary, seemed to eat but slowly. At stated intervals he plucked a gooseberry and devoured it with solemnity, but often he drew his hand back from the bushes absently, without seeming to notice he had gathered nothing. His gaze turned invariably to Aline, who sat with her skirts tucked tightly about her, composedly choosing the ripest fruit and rapidly squeezing it between her red lips. She placed a little

hoard in her lap, from which she selected first the large green berries, then the smaller and sweeter ones of a dull maroon, nibbling the thin skins daintily, and, after the first cautious bite, tossing them aside with a little wry face if they were sour. Soon he observed that the thorns had inflicted some red angry scratches across her hand, and he began watching for the moment when she was about to thrust it back amongst the branches, that he might hold them apart for her to reach the fruit more easily.

Some of the lobelias in her hat had grown loose, and nodded lightly with each movement of her head. He remarked how gracefully the garland rested on the broad brim. Though arranged in thick careless clusters, the flowers had been put together with exquisite taste—lightly and delicately—and the result was quaint and pretty in the extreme. He wondered if it had been a mere childish freak on her part, decking herself thus with the sweetest and most perfect blossoms she could find, or whether the idea was due to the promptings of

a coquetry which recognized in the bright fragrant flowers a means of enhancing her already too dangerous beauty. A little of both, perhaps. The girl was a charming mixture of the child and the woman, an exquisite piece of complex human machinery. Not a prize production of womanhood like Maud Heathcote, endowed with more than womanhood's fair share of both muscles and brains; not—thank Heaven for it!—not a pitiable edition like poor Judy, an unpleasant illustration of Nature's failures; but a sweet, bewildering, all-human little being, faulty and lovable; with all the ordinary inconsistencies and follies of her sex, with all its warm, clinging nature and need of protecting love, and with more than its ordinary charm and witchery; a creature to enchain a man's senses and hold him captive in pleasing torture, to inspire in him at once a sense of worship and a maddening desire for possession and mastery; a creature who seemed to hold a dual power in the glance of her soft eyes; who could rouse in him both an ideal reverence

for her pure womanhood and a more human enjoyment of her beauty, but who—so he might have summed up the manner in which he regarded her—once conquered by a woman's strength of affection, would be charmingly amenable to his superior will, and who was all the while his inferior, a frail, brainless, pliable organism, specially designed by a considerate Providence for his entire satisfaction.

Aline Graham gained in charm as the reaction from much that had lately been out of harmony with his nature. He was aware that the society in which he found himself was hopelessly unsuited to him. Maud Heathcote, for one, had always inspired him with an element of irritation. At the time of his departure for India, when she had been a girl of five-and-twenty, in all the first excitement and romance of her engagement to a man to whom she was deeply attached, she had struck him as a type of woman who was essentially a mistake in Nature's economy; a

woman with pronounced opinions and strongly-developed characteristics; an enthusiast, and painfully *fin de siècle*. After the lapse of so many years, she produced the same impression on his mind. She had lost much of her old excitability and vivacity; she was no longer enthusiastic and positive as formerly; she no longer aired her opinions on all occasions, and treated those who differed from her with amiable contempt. But she was still at heart the Maud of old days—original, sarcastic, strong-minded; in short, one whom, it seemed to him, men might find a good friend, or whom they might pursue because she treated them with such supreme indifference, but who could scarcely be their ideal either of an agreeable conversationalist, or, on the other hand, of an amenable helpmate.

As to Judy, apart from all other failings, she seemed to him in many ways an echo of Maud—an *esprit fort*, at times aggressively original, with pronounced views on most subjects, and a love of self-assertion which found

vent in constant attempts to be contradictory and argumentative. Like Maud, she was wanting in that mobility of character and absence of positiveness which he considered an essential to true womanliness. They both jarred upon his sense of fitness, and occasionally oppressed him with an unaccountable awkwardness, till—he acknowledged to himself—from being in an uncongenial atmosphere, he felt a fool, and as though he were intellectually out of depth.

It was a relief, therefore, after their society, to find himself with a simple, womanly, understandable creature like the girl beside him, to whom he could talk without the sense of oppression with which Maud's presence affected him, and at whom he could look without the painful shock which Judy's appearance never failed to produce. He felt once more in his element, and restored to his natural ease and self-confidence. Aline was not troubled with any aggressive originality, she did not dabble in metaphysics and flaunt them inconsiderately in the faces of those who did not appreciate

them, she was not burdened with too much intellectuality ; but she filled woman's first duty of looking charming on all occasions, and was in most points a representative of the type of woman whose society men would always seek where choice was possible.

How perfect her face looked under that flower-covered hat ! She possessed a happy consciousness of her own beauty. The glances which she bent upon him from time to time were accompanied by an evidently mischievous enjoyment of the effect they produced. How fascinating it would be to make those malicious eyes droop beneath a gaze which they were unable to meet ; to see the long dark lashes quiver and fall slowly on to the soft cheek with a shame but dimly comprehended ; to make the sweet mocking face grow suddenly confused, and see it burn with a warmth of feeling to which it was yet a stranger ! Hugh's heart beat faster. It would be interesting to subdue this flippant, tantalizing creature ; to make her experience the all-conquering force which love

can exercise on woman's nature. The man who first robbed her of her sweet waywardness would see her wake from a dream-life of childish vanity into a woman bewildered and shamefaced at the world on whose threshold she had so ignorantly been pausing——

His train of thought was interrupted by the light touch of Aline's hand brushing accidentally against his own. Looking down, he perceived she was trying to reach some fruit in the midst of the bush, having taken advantage of an opening which he had made for her by holding one of the branches aside. The touch of her hand lingered upon his own; he could feel it as it had lain a moment against his, smooth and tiny, pulsing with warm life. He would hold the branch lower, so that she could not draw it back without touching him once more. He saw that her sleeve had slipped back from her wrist; thus he would feel—first the bare smooth arm, then the little soft hand doubled up over its prize of fruit.

He waited with a delicious expectancy. Now

he could feel a movement in the form beside his own—Aline's shoulder had touched his. Already she was drawing her hand back through the prickly branches; it was coming slowly, slowly nearer, moving thus leisurely, he reflected, because he had taken a base opportunity of entrapping it in an opening too small to allow its safe passage through the thorns.

A feeling of compunction made him glance quickly at the face so near his own. Was some suspicion of his culpable little manoeuvres legible there? Did the red lips quiver nervously, the breath come more swiftly from between them? He could feel it passing softly over his face when he leant closer. Then the lace ruffle of a sleeve brushed against his hand; he glanced down once more. How tiny and soft looked the little hand beside his firm brown one! Again it touched his wrist lightly, and a curious electric influence passed into him. His veins grew on fire. Holding his breath, he watched the hand which lay defencelessly

within his reach, till, as it emerged from the bushes, with an impulse whose suddenness baffled all control, he imprisoned it in a half-fierce grasp, scattering its little treasure-trove of fruit right and left on the ground. Then, as he felt the girl start and tremble in his hold, he passed his arm masterfully about her, and drew her helplessly down, pressing her head tightly to his breast.

For one moment he held her there—one moment, when there seemed an intense, an appalling silence about them; when he could hear her heart throb, and feel her breast panting against his own. She was like some delicate flower he could crush in his strong rough hold. Then he imprinted one reckless kiss on the soft sun-warmed cheek now crimsoned with shame, and paused; breathlessly triumphant at her entire helplessness.

Only for a moment, and then the madness passed—the savage instinct which in the space of a few seconds had erased the long trainings of civilization in the man, obliterating with one

bold sweep of Nature the nice distinctions, the fine perceptions of honour, the self-imposed restraint. Hugh sprang up, confounded at what he had done—sprang up to see the girl staring at him with blanched face and wide frightened eyes, and to realize with rapid distinctness that he had been fashioning for himself a net other than the frail one which lay tangibly encircling his shoulders.

So Love tricks his puppets. He makes them dance gaily to his piping; fills them with mirth at the capers of their fellow-puppets; draws them on, blind and deluded, to work his will. And to what end? Philosophy would tell us that thus, unwittingly, Nature's mysterious demand for perpetuation of the species must be complied with, that this earth may be replenished with creatures, who, for a brief space, walk its surface, experience—strive—fill Love's imperative behest, and sink back into the earth from which they sprung. But the wherefore of Nature's demand—who shall say?

“For women (I am a woman now like you)
There is no good of life but love—but love!
What else looks good, is some shade flung from love;
Love gilds it, gives it worth. . . .
Never you cheat yourself one instant!”

R. BROWNING.

CHAPTER IV.

DINNER was over. In the library at Lilcot Sir Edward had settled down to the papers; Judy was established in a big armchair with a book; and Aline, seated near the red-shaded lamp, was alternately sipping her coffee and exercising her ingenuity on a piece of fancy-work which she was outlining in elaborate designs of her own invention. The light fell softly upon her bent head, with its silky hair which seemed to vie in both shade and texture with the fabric of her tea-gown, while, as she plied her needle—drawing it with its trail of pink silk swiftly to and from the canvas on her lap—her arms, moving in and out of her flowing sleeves, contrasted in creamy fairness with the bright maize silk.

At last she finished her coffee, and, setting the cup down noiselessly in its saucer, began folding up her work. Next, she placed the neat roll of canvas, with its attendant bundle of gaudy silks, upon the table, and, rising, crept quietly away to the open drawing-room door, passed through it, and closed it after her.

As she disappeared Judy looked up, drew herself to the edge of her chair, shut her book, and leant forward with an odd look of expectancy and intentness upon her face.

In the drawing-room two shaded candelabra on the mantelpiece gave a subdued light, and formed unsubstantial counterparts in the glass in front of which they stood. Aline moved slowly to the piano at the further end of the room, and, seating herself before it, ran her fingers lightly and it might be a trifle nervously over the keys. Then she began to softly play a waltz, and, after a while, she sang to her playing, cooing to herself in a low voice, which at times floated out clear and sweet, then died away into a dreamy whisper. But, through

the sound of the music, she was keenly alive to the tramp of feet which paced the terrace outside; soon she was aware of some irregularity introduced into the tread, and, after a while, she recognized that the sound had ceased. Then she knew, without the evidence of actual vision, that a figure stood in the open window, and, believing itself concealed by the darkness, watched her motionlessly.

Again she sang, and now a faint note of triumph found its way into her voice—a ring of tremulous irrepressible gladness. By a whim of imagination she had changed places with that silent watcher, and could picture the scene presented to his gaze. Was it not delicate in outline and colour—the dim room, the silk-clad figure, the pensive face, and over all the sense of music floating plaintively, dreamily? Was not the soft maize robe of Grecian-like simplicity? Did not the fillet of gold round the fair head show darkly against the paler gold of the hair? What of the round whiteness of her arms as they moved against her silken

sleeves, the tiny pink-lined fingers flitting over the keys, the throbbing curve of the full young throat as its song ebbed and flowed, the delicate loveliness of the face which surmounted it in its setting of misty hair? Did she not feel that the gladness of her heart intensified her beauty—that her eyes had a more tender light, her cheeks were suffused with a softer glow? There came to her a new-born joy for her fair young beauty, something grander, wider than she had known hitherto; a joy such as she had never dreamed for a great and good gift, and for all that gift could bring. And, as she still sang on, into her voice there crept a strange prayerfulness. The waltz grew slower, and framed itself into a swelling wordless psalm; her head drooped, and bowed itself unconsciously with a reverence of mute thanksgiving.

And to Hugh, watching outside in the night, the scene presented an even more entrancing aspect than she had pictured, and was one of all-absorbing interest.

Since the humiliating episode amongst the gooseberry bushes, he had spent his time reviewing his conduct on that occasion, and endeavouring to decide upon the position he must assume in future towards Miss Graham. He was aware that, in the little episode itself and in his subsequent incoherent apologies, he had overstepped the boundary-line between mere flirtation and actual love-making, and had compromised himself to an extent he had never foreseen or intended. Still, he reflected, it was weak to tamely allow one's self to be the victim of circumstances. Other men compromised themselves seriously, and, by a little dexterous management, afterwards steered clear of precipitating themselves into matrimony. The situation was one which required careful consideration.

As to his conduct, he had but one opinion. He did not attempt to palliate it. That he—a man of the world who prided himself on his self-possession and faultless *savoir-faire*, should have been unable to indulge in a passing

flirtation without losing his head and insulting a charming girl in a manner which was wholly inexcusable, was a humiliating reflection. Hugh's was not a nature which could rise to the pure-minded reverence for Woman which feels that until she, of her own free will, descends from the elevation to which she is entitled out of the mire, each too-human look or thought directed towards her is a species of profanation—this attitude was above his comprehension; but the whole vanity of the man was piqued at having fallen short of his own standard of excellence—of having laid himself open to the offensive charge of being without those visible tokens of civilization which constitute that product of moral evolution, a *gentleman*. This fact was gall and wormwood to him. A thousand times he called himself a cad, a fool; and now only, viewing that picture of the girl as she sat playing in the dim room, did he find an excuse for his behaviour.

He had never been alone with Aline Graham since the moment when they had parted in

a condition of mutual embarrassment after their hurried walk back from the kitchen-garden to the house. They had met at meals, when they had contrived to sustain a civil though somewhat strained conversation ; but, on all other occasions, they had fought shy of each other's society, and, while mutually desiring it, were mutually afraid of appearing to do so.

He was fully aware, however, that his attitude towards her must shortly assume some definite standpoint. That the girl's feeling for him had progressed beyond mere Platonic liking, she had sufficiently betrayed in her confusion ; it remained only to decide whether he should retire as gracefully as circumstances would permit from the mess in which he found himself, or whether he should, not unwillingly, accept the situation and consider himself tied to this sweet pink-and-white bit of humanity he had so impulsively appropriated. On the one hand, he had a natural dislike to taking a step of lifelong import ; on the other hand, he had a strong sense of honour—where he recognized it

—and as his wishes, all unacknowledged by himself, now coincided with the course which honour seemed to dictate, he pleased himself with the reflection that, in following that course, he would be acting in a highly meritorious manner.

His decision trembling thus in the balance, he watched the girl whose fate lay in his hands; and, as the subtle influence of the music stole upon him, he felt caution and cool-headed calculation evaporating. Why fret one's self with so much questioning? Why try to exercise the prudence of age rather than the privilege of youth? He would enjoy the present hour and leave the next to be what it would. After all, there was no genius like the genius of recklessness. He would be guarded only not to commit himself further, but he would taste to the full the critical romance of the situation, and the morrow might take care of the things of itself.

He entered the room and saw a great tenderness creep into the girl's face, saw the wave of deep colour which overspread her cheeks and

stole down to her fair white neck, saw her fingers tremble on the keys and heard them lag with a sudden tell-tale powerlessness.

Did Love laugh as he pulled the puppet-strings?

In the next room Judy sat leaning forwards. She had heard the strains of the waltz mingle with the steady tramp of footsteps outside the house. The steps seemed to be beating time to the measure of the music. On the writing-table, near at hand, the clock ticked angrily, racing the footsteps. Next, the tramp on the terrace varied, and into the music simultaneously crept something of a change; it was less regular and smooth. Soon the footsteps outside ceased, and the music developed a new phase, sounding loud and decisive at one moment, at the next weak and unsteady. Finally it was silent, and there was a great stillness, while the clock ticked on triumphantly. Then, after a while, there was again the tread of feet outside, but in increased number. They passed once, and did not return.

Judy got up from her chair. Sir Edward was nodding over his papers. She stole across to the drawing-room door and opened it softly. The room was empty. She entered and looked about her. The candles on the mantelpiece were guttering with the draught from the open window, a few pieces of music lay untidily upon the floor, the piano was open. She crossed to the corner, picked up the music and placed it upon its stand, closed the piano, blew out one or two of the candles which flickered, and then walked to the window. She stepped outside on to the terrace and peered about her. No one was in sight. She walked away from the house, and, descending the terrace steps, made her way to a seat near the top of the lawn, upon which she proceeded to perch herself, and sat there swinging her legs backwards and forwards like a child upon a chair which is too high for it.

There was no moon visible, though the stars shone brightly. In the distance, the rush of the weir made a soothing murmur. A faint breeze wandered, sighing, past the house. She

moved into the corner of the seat, and sat very still, leaning her head back and looking absently up at the sky.

Soon she started into an upright position and glanced hurriedly round. There was a sound of footsteps on the gravel paths near the house. She kept her eyes fixed in the direction from whence it came, till two figures emerged into sight, looking like black shadows through the darkness. They walked slowly along by the terrace, and the light from the windows fell upon them, revealing the dark outline of a man's figure and the fluttering movement of a girl's light dress. An indistinct murmur of voices reached the spot where Judy sat, but no words were distinguishable.

The two figures vanished into the darkness, but soon returned, and continued to pace up and down, the rosy light from the library and the paler light from the drawing-room alternately falling upon them, till they again grew vague and ghost-like in the night. Judy clasped her knees with her hands, and swaying

slowly backwards and forwards, watched them intently. After a time she began to keep up a running comment to herself in an undertone.

“They have been sitting up in the shrubbery on that wooden seat enclosed by four great laurels. It is very sheltered up there. One hears the burn trickle past on its way down to the fountain, dropping over the stones which form tiny cascades. They would see a patch of clear sky up above the bushes, and the stars peering like eyes between the leaves. They left it very soon? Aline must have grown cold; her silk is thin . . . yet the night is warm. . . . They are walking up and down the terrace because she is wearing bronze shoes, and the gravel hurts her. After a time they will go back to the shrubbery and sit there again.”

She moved her feet up on to the seat so that her knees were nearly as high as her head; then, planting one elbow against them, she rested her chin upon her hand. She still watched the pair above, and there was a smile upon her face.

“This is play!” she informed herself with emphasis. “Yes, play! An amusement I too should have indulged in if Nature had not fashioned me on an original pattern. As it is, I shall never take part in this game of ‘mental fencing,’ this battledore and shuttlecock with hearts and the future of lives. Therefore here is a chance opportunity for studying it and observing how it is played. To enter into its true spirit one must imagine it is real. The players themselves do this, I believe. Odd that the future of lives should be decided by such pretty trifling! That my own unsatisfactory existence came from just such pretty romancing and play! What a prosaic reality to have sprung from a bit of unsubstantial poetry!”

“From an artistic point of view, it is quite a pity, in this case, that it should be merely play; they would make such a good-looking couple. Aline is charmingly pretty. I suppose, walking close beside her, he can see her features even in the semi-darkness? She always looks so pale and ethereal in the dusk. From here,

her yellow silk is white. As the red light falls upon her, she looks wrapped in fire from head to foot. Even her hair must be rosy if I could see, and her face must be tinted a soft pink—all but her eyes, and they will be even darker and deeper than by daylight.

“Hugh, too, is good-looking in his way. He looks particularly well beside her. I have noticed that several times.

“Moreover, there are other points in which they are admirably suited.

“Nellie must have been designed by Nature for an advertisement-sample of Woman. She takes life so placidly. She never criticizes. She will care quite sufficiently for the man whom she sees will make a good husband, and never enough to ruffle her smiling equanimity. She would never feel that terrible isolation of a great love—that affection which can serve as a sharp beacon-light to show how wide a gulf exists eternally between heart and heart. I fancy she must be man’s Ideal of Woman; a gentle creature who takes life as she finds it,

who never questions what may lie beyond the area of her own tiny nose ; a creature unsuited to fend for herself—who, in return for the affection meted out to her, will love submissively, uncritically, contented to fill the *rôle* of Divinity, Plaything, or Slave according to her owner's good pleasure. Oh, the man who marries her may consider himself a lucky fellow ! ”

Judy laughed softly to herself, but the laugh had in it something strained, and she caught her breath, ending it abruptly. After a few minutes she continued her soliloquy.

“ Yes, he would make her a most suitable husband. His disposition is much her own ; very matter-of-fact, conventional, unintellectual, with an enviably comfortable opinion of himself. I find myself wondering what I saw in Hugh as a boy. I used to look up to him with such awe. He was my hero, my ideal. A few years makes a marvellous difference in one's judgment ! I doubt if he has altered much ; but now I see him a commonplace, narrow-minded, obstinate

being, without even the faintest dash of cleverness in his composition. A being who would bore me very speedily—yes, bore me——”

She moved a little restlessly on the seat.

“Now they are standing still, looking away at the shadowy view. I am glad they cannot see me down here. They would think I was spying—though I have as much right to enjoy a fine evening as they have! I seem able to see more clearly now; I have grown accustomed to the dark. The light from the house falls upon her sideways, and I can distinguish her features. She looks like a spirit in her fluttering white drapery; and her face is pale, clear and soft. I cannot see her eyes, but she is turning them towards him—they will be very full and bright; then she will droop the dark lashes slowly on to her cheeks with that pretty trick she has. Hugh must admire her. She would make him a charming wife—but for one thing—and surely that is not an insuperable objection? Anyway, I will imagine it does not exist. Well—she would always look sweet and

pretty, always be well dressed. She would know how to spend money and enjoy having it to spend, which is in itself a charm. He loves society, and so does she. She would make a good hostess, bright and agreeable. The village people would like her—how she would do the popular among them! She would have pretty children with fair hair and pink cheeks like herself. Hugh would be very proud of her. She would make a good mistress of Lilcot—*of my home!*”

A slight tremor came into Judy's voice. She folded her arms and went on steadily—

“Hugh's great merit is his good nature. Under those circumstances he would be very kind to me, very. I can see even now how he tries to overcome his dislike to me. He would try just as praiseworthily to do his duty towards me, and enact the kind guardian and brother conscientiously. He does his utmost to develop some brotherly affection for me. He—yes, he——”

Suddenly her voice broke. Dropping heavily

back upon the seat, she clutched the twisted wood and clung to it with a grasp which left her hands bloodless.

“O God,” she moaned, “have pity! God have pity—have pity!”

Her voice rose in a despairing cry all the more terrible because it was suppressed, and because all its anguish was concentrated into a mere whisper. Her whole frame shook with sobs, though her eyes were dry and bright. She leant her face upon her cold arms, and tossed to and fro beneath the storm of grief which possessed her.

And, only a few yards distant, stood a girl with the soft love-light in her eyes and the joy of a first love in her heart; a girl triumphant in the power of her young beauty, rejoicing in health and strength, viewing life through a glamour of romance which each moment presented a more radiant prospect to her vision. Nature is fond of contrasts.

The same wind which kissed Aline’s fair face and light waving hair, passed on to whisper

drearily above the little dark figure alone with its sorrow on the seat below. Judy writhed in her misery, and buried her teeth in the soft flesh of her arm, that in the sense of physical pain she might find relief from the sting and torment of a more cruel evil. Her whole being was convulsed with the desperate effort to recover her self-control. She quivered beneath the stress of her noiseless sobs.

Then Fate was merciful to her. The pair standing so unconsciously within earshot of any incautious cry she might utter, moved away. Perhaps they returned to the seat in the shrubbery, as she had anticipated; but she realized that they had left the terrace, and the painful restraint of their presence was removed. She moaned aloud with a luxury of relief. Twisting her arms tightly through the wood-work of the seat, she clung to it and pressed her cheek against it, sobbing like a tired child.

After a time the paroxysm subsided; she rose up, quiet and exhausted, and crept back to the house. Entering by the open window,

she made her way to the dining-room, and poured some water out of a jug into one of the finger-glasses on the sideboard; then, soaking her handkerchief in the cold water, she bathed her eyes, her lips, her forehead, and stood a moment enjoying the soothing freshness produced by the moisture. Next, she applied both hands to her white cheeks, and rubbed them roughly and vigorously till they burnt beneath her touch, and a semblance of healthy colour appeared upon them. This accomplished, she went back to the library, and entered it with a smile upon her face, and no visible trace of that mad storm of grief which had passed over her.

“Never happy any more!

Ay, turn the saying o'er and o'er,
It says but what it said before,
And heart and life are just as sore.

.

Never happy any more!

Put the light out, shut the door,
Sweep the wet leaves from the floor.
Even thus Fate's hand has swept her floor,
Even thus Love's hand has shut the door
Through which his warm feet passed of yore.
Shall it be opened any more?

No, no, no more.”

D. G. ROSSETTI.

CHAPTER V.

As she crossed the room, Sir Edward looked up with an air of mild surprise.

“So there you are, little girl,” he observed. “I was really beginning to wonder what could have become of everybody. I must have napped for a few moments over my papers, and when I opened my eyes you had all fled.”

“I have been outside to enjoy the fine evening,” said Judy. “Hugh was smoking, and Aline was in the next room playing.”

“Oh, so every one was diversely employed! And now you have come back to look after your old dad. Where are the other two? Are they out-of-doors?”

“I believe so.”

"They seem to get on pretty well, don't you think?" remarked Sir Edward, turning over the *Times*.

Judy looked up quickly. But Sir Edward's face was the embodiment of unsuspecting satisfaction. She lifted up a paper-knife from the writing-table and twirled it restlessly between her fingers.

"They get on capitally," she answered.

"I am very glad of that," said Sir Edward, in a tone of extreme content. "It is a great thing, though not of such vital importance as if Aline were continuing to make this her home. Still, Hugh will have many opportunities of being kind to the poor girl when the old place belongs to him. I like to feel, when that day comes, he will be a good brother to her as well as to you."

Judy came round and stood in front of her father. For a moment she hesitated; then she spoke, and her voice was clear and steady, though the hand which held the paper-knife was trembling slightly.

“Dad,” she said smilingly, “you will be amused at what I am going to say, but—can you imagine it?—I have changed my mind entirely, and come to the conclusion it is a pity Nellie should leave us! I might probably discover when too late I had made a great mistake, and, as she and Hugh get on so well, it seems unkind to nip their acquaintance in the bud; scarcely fair towards Aline, I think, when, as you say, his kindness might be a great object to her in the future.”

Sir Edward laid down the paper and regarded Judy with a smile of excessive amusement.

“Well, of all the changeable little women I ever came across, you are the most unaccountable!” he said. “A few days ago you could find no arguments strong enough to convince me it would be a great mistake for Aline to remain here; now you are just as anxious to persuade me it would be a pity for her to leave us. What am I to think?”

“Ah—but, you see,” continued Judy, “circumstances alter cases. I did not know then

that she and Hugh would be friends—that we should all get on so well together. I had not considered what you suggest about the future.”

Sir Edward shook his head doubtfully.

“I am afraid your present view of the matter comes too late. You know it is all settled now ; she wrote to her aunt and arranged everything. She would not change her plans without any fresh reason for doing so. I am very willing she should stay with us, but I don’t see how it could be managed, because——”

“Dad,” said Judy, stepping nearer to him and resting one hand on his shoulder, “I have had my own way all my life, and it is no use your beginning to rebel now !”

Sir Edward laughed with fresh amusement at her perversity.

“What an obstinate little body it is ?” he observed, with an air of remonstrance. “How am I to prevent the girl going if she wishes to do so ?”

“But,” persisted Judy, “she had a great

notion that she should be in the way when Hugh came—that he might not like her being here. Now that she sees this is not the case, I believe, if you asked her, you would find she does not wish to go.”

Judy turned the paper-knife round and round in her nervous fingers. The unnatural colour which had been upon her cheeks was rapidly fading. She was growing very white.

“It is really,” said Sir Edward, after a pause, “a matter for the girl herself to decide. I can but ask her again what she wishes, and see what she says.”

“Yes,” said Judy, “we will see what she says.”

“You are not going to bed, my dear?”

“Yes; I am tired—very tired. Good night, daddy.”

She put her arms round his neck, and kissed him softly on his cheek and among the locks of his white hair; then, turning away, she walked from the room with that peculiar limp which denoted haste.

“Poor little girl!” said Sir Edward. “How did she get tired?”

Upstairs, in Judy’s room, the moonlight lay across the floor. When she first entered she wondered what it might be, for, only a few moments previously, the night had been dark. Walking to the window, she sat down and looked out at the changed scene. The moon had escaped from the darkness which before enveloped it, and was floating through the heavens, a clear ball of light against a background of dusky sky. The park was bathed in a ghostly radiance; the trees still were black against the paler heavens, but their boughs were fringed with light, and the ground seemed to be covered with a chilly mantle of silver frost.

Surely that pale light must feel cold and soft? Judy laid her head upon the window-sill and closed her eyes.

Far away in the village, some band was playing a dance-tune. The sound came faintly,

mellowed by distance, and carried fitfully by the sighing breeze. In the fine warm night the village youths and maidens must be dancing upon the green, doubtless all unwearied by the hard work of the day which was past, all unmindful of the heavy turf over which, heavily shod, they could yet turn and whirl with inexhaustible energy.

Moving thus to the music with strong supple limbs—with the spell of some simple romance in their hearts mingling with the joy of their own vigorous youth—were they conscious of the wide stretch of starlight over their heads ; of the mystery and stir of the dreamy night ; of the soft rush and whisper of the breeze in the dark boughs ; of the glimmer of moonlight on the pool hard by, twinkling ceaselessly through the trees ? Did stolen glances and halting speeches gain a strange magic in this pale cold light ? When tired of the restless energy of the music, did the dancers wander away into the stillness, with the starlight and that same calm moon rousing in their souls the

elixir of hot-blooded youth and love? And were there sad hearts, too, there amongst the glad ones—souls to whom the moon and the stars spoke only of lifelong pain; of heart-throbs which must be stilled by the languid touch of cold joyless years; of feet which lagged with the strain of a mirth they did not feel, and eyes bright only with the torment of unshed tears? Maybe these were to be found there also.

Judy raised her head and gazed through the darkness, as though, beyond the silent park, she could see a vision of the rustic dance. As this moon and these stars seemed whispering the old, old tale of love to-night, so had they whispered it to generations which were now dust, and so would they whisper it to generations which were yet to come. The forgotten sleepers beneath those quiet green mounds in the churchyard had, ere their blood slackened and their hearts waxed still, all listened to this tale; had all felt the pulse beat quick and the blood flow warm under its spell in these still summer nights; had all known the swift

intoxicating joy, the sharp torment, or the slow numbing pain of a lifelong despair which it had brought them. Ay, each little mound of human dust had once so quickened and gladdened at sight of one other little mound which had chanced to live in the sunshine while itself so lived, and now lay mingling with the earth while itself so mingled. And each little mound had, by chance or by design, so worked the weal or woe of some other little mound now lying still and silent as itself.

So it had ever been since this world first bore human life, and so it would be on into the countless ages yet unknown. And just so brief would ever be that joy or that anguish ! To-day this little human dust lived and laughed ; to-morrow it lay quiet and cold. To-night it wandered joying in the warm breath of summer, in the darkness, in the stars, in the eyes which spoke to its soul of Love the Eternal which could never wane nor chill ; to-morrow the sweet breath of night might murmur about it,

all the stars of heaven shine above it, the eyes it loved might weep hot tears over it or smile as brightly for another, and it would neither know nor care. Just so brief was it all—so brief!

Judy laid her head back in the pale soft light.

How long it was, she could not have told, before her door opened gently, and, near her in the moonlight, was standing a slender figure, on whom the cold rays seemed to fall with steely brightness. Centring upon the white form, they gave to its beauty something unearthly, intangible; but failed to pale the hue of the warm living cheek, or the lustre of the glad bright eyes.

“Judy,” said Aline’s voice, “why are you sitting here in the dark? I wondered if you had gone to bed. I wanted to tell you something to-night.”

Judy rose up from her chair, and stood, her small figure outlined blackly against the pale line of sky.

"Yes?" she said, in a tone of apathetic inquiry.

"Judy," said Aline, "I have something very exciting to tell you. I came to tell you—I am engaged to be married!"

There was a great stillness in the room. The white figure and the dark figure were both silent. A cloud floated over the moon, plunging them into darkness.

"Are you surprised, Judy? or did you guess it? Do you know who I mean?"

"Yes," said Judy, slowly; "I know."

"I am afraid you must be tired to-night," said Aline, a shade of disappointment mingling with the happy excitement of her voice. "If so, I won't stay to bother you—I can tell you all about it in the morning; but we settled it this evening; and look!"—she tendered for inspection her little hand, with a heavy gold signet-ring upon the fourth finger—"it is too dark for you to see, but Hugh says this has never been off his finger since he was a small boy, so I expect you know it. It is a great deal too

big for me, but I am to wear it till he can get me a proper engagement-ring."

Judy turned towards the window.

"Does Hugh know everything?" she asked.

"No!" exclaimed Aline, hurriedly. "How could I say anything? And why should I? He has not given me his love conditionally!" She gave a short laugh.

"You will put yourself in a very false position," said Judy, stolidly, still looking out of the window. "*I* shall say nothing, and father is not at all likely to mention it; but Hugh is sure to hear, sooner or later."

"Judy!" exclaimed Aline, nearly crying, "it would make no difference if he did; and it is horridly unkind of you to rake up disagreeable matters to-night of all nights! I was so happy when I came here to tell you, and now you have spoilt it all and made me wretched. How can you know what I feel?" she added petulantly. "You can't know or understand what love means, and how we care for each other. You go out of your way to fling in my

face what I might more justly be pitied for. I might as well taunt you with——”

She paused abruptly.

“With my deformity? Yes!” supplemented Judy, quietly; yet she shrank back as though she had been struck. The words seemed to vibrate harshly and repeat themselves from the walls of the room.

“Of course I shall tell Hugh some day,” Aline continued quickly. “It would be so different when we are married. Why can’t you leave me to manage my own affairs?”

“Certainly!” Judy drew herself up to the extent of her diminutive height. “Besides, even *I* can understand you are wise not to run any risk of losing Lilcot and all your marriage with Hugh entails.”

Again there was an oppressive silence in the room. Outside, the trees whispered in the night; far away, in the village, the band played with insistence—quickly, gladly. Then the moon rode from behind a cloud, and, creeping into the quiet room, fell upon the black figure

as it stepped hastily forwards and flung its arms round the neck of the white one.

“Oh, I am a cad, Nel—a cad!” cried Judy. “I wish you luck with my whole heart. And for the rest—you may forgive me, Nellie—forgive me!”

An hour later, when the house was very silent, with all its lights out, its doors safely bolted against unwelcome intruders, and its inhabitants presumably at rest, the setting moon still shed a pale light over the park; and at the one unshuttered window on the white front of the house a little figure still sat watching—very reflective, very motionless. The white rays, stealing into the silent room behind it, emphasized all on which they rested with cold brightness, and, touching a minute circle of gold which lay upon the floor, made it glitter palely, tinting it the hue of a less precious metal.

Was there something ominous in the fact that Aline Graham, in the excitement of her

newly-found happiness, should have let the temporary engagement-ring drop from off her finger?

And was there something ominous in the action of the little dark figure, who, on espying the small circle, picked it up hurriedly, placed it upon her own thin finger, kissed it hungrily, and, pressing it to her cheeks—her lips—her breast—burst into a crazy storm of tears?

“That hair, not unlike yours—as bright, but with a warmer golden tinge!

Those eyes, a somewhat deeper light, that dreamed beneath a longer fringe!

And still that strange grave smile she had stays in my soul and keeps it sad.”

OWEN MEREDITH.

CHAPTER VI.

SIR EDWARD took the announcement of Hugh's engagement with but slight surprise. He always accepted with unruffled condescension all arrangements made for him by Providence without his special sanction.

"I could have wished you might have found some girl amongst the neighbouring county families—and trouble might come of this. Still, the girl is a very sweet little girl, and it is a great comfort to me to think she should have some natural protector," was his somewhat enigmatic comment.

Hugh concluded that the reference to some trouble connected with the engagement referred to the fact that Aline's relations, being poor,

might consider her marriage an excellent opportunity for palming themselves off upon her. He remembered having heard that his aunt, Lady Lilcot, had been afflicted with an ever-increasing train of impecunious Scotch cousins, of whom Sir Edward had a righteous horror. Possibly some of these had been Grahams. He decided to question Aline on the subject of her relatives at some convenient opportunity. It was well to be prepared for the worst !

The engagement was not to be publicly announced for the present. Only a few intimate friends were to be initiated into the news which later—Judy remarked—would fall like a bombshell amongst the hopes of many buoyant-hearted mothers. It was a question at present whether Hugh would or would not be able to avoid returning to India as before arranged ; and, until this matter was decided, the date of the marriage was so extremely indefinite, that it was as well to delay universal speculation on this subject.

Among the friends who were to be told,

under pledge of secrecy, Aline stipulated the Daltons must be the first.

“You see,” she explained, “Alice is a great friend of mine, so afterwards, when she heard about it, she would think me so disagreeable not to have told her. Besides”—Aline’s face grew mischievous—“it will be kind to set Mrs. Dalton’s mind at rest ; she is always so nervous about her sweet Frank !”

Hugh laughed—a miniature laugh of complacency and gratified vanity.

“Frank is so much to be pitied, I feel quite generously disposed towards him,” he observed, stroking his moustache. “Yes, let us have the dog-cart and drive over there to tea.”

They were standing by the window in the dining-room. Judy, having arrived late upon the scene, was still eating her breakfast. Now she looked up for a moment.

“It will rain,” she observed laconically.

“It certainly looks doubtful,” admitted Aline ; “but if it holds up we may as well go ; and do please be sure to come too, Judy, because, until

our engagement is announced, Hugh and I had better not be seen driving about the country alone. As neither you nor I would like the back seat of the dog-cart for a nine miles' drive, had we not better have the pony-carriage to take us up to the station and go by train?"

"Go in the phaeton," suggested Judy. "I don't mind taking a back seat then!"

"Well, if you really don't mind that, it would do charmingly," said Aline, with a shy glance at Hugh to see if he approved of this plan.

"Would it not be a better arrangement for Judy and the groom to go in the front, and for ourselves to occupy the back seat?" he whispered in her ear.

For answer, she held up her finger with reproving archness.

"It is really very good of you to do Gooseberry so willingly, Judy," she said aloud. "It must be quite the first time you have been pressed into the service! I am afraid you will find it a dull office!"

“On the contrary,” said Judy, cheerfully, “I cannot imagine anything more amusing!”

Aline bit her lip, and Hugh hastened to change the subject.

“You have heard no more of your ring, have you, Aline?” he inquired.

Aline shook her head.

“Nothing whatever. It was so odd the way I lost it. As I told you, directly I got back to my room that evening I noticed it was gone, and I walked all down the passage again hunting for it. I was afraid of going back to Judy’s room then, because she had gone to bed; but the next morning I asked her to look for it, and she said it was nowhere on the floor there.”

“Well, it is of no importance,” said Hugh, contriving to imprison the ringless hand—Judy being intent on her breakfast. “In a few days I shall run up to town and choose something prettier than that clumsy old signet-ring, which I merely put on your finger because”—he lowered his voice—“because I could not bear to

leave this little hand another night without some badge of—of——”

“Servitude?” suggested Judy, briskly.

Aline, with a wrathful glance in the direction of the breakfast-table, withdrew her hand, and announcing that she heard the butler in the next room, disappeared into the drawing-room to order the carriage.

Hugh, awaiting her return, remained looking out of the window with that species of vacant smile upon his face in which persons engaged in pleasant rumination so often indulge, to the irritation of their less agreeably occupied fellows. Truth to tell, he was at this moment supremely satisfied with the world in general and himself in particular. He had behaved—so he told himself—in a more honourable and praiseworthy manner than most men would have done under similar circumstances to those in which he had found himself, and virtue had brought more than its proverbially meagre reward. The step which, but for the necessity for immediate action, he might never have

taken, which, at all events, he would have postponed—dallying with Fate and always fearful of bringing his deliberation to a close—that step he had been led to adopt with a haste which left him aghast, only to discover he had, after all, been startled into doing what was indispensable to his happiness.

He was heartily relieved that the decision had—in a way—been thrust upon him, and that he might comfortably dwell upon the pros of matrimony rather than the cons. It saved a lot of trouble to realize he was unquestionably in the mesh beyond escape, and so might give himself up, without one sigh of regret, to the satisfaction of his present bliss. Certainly, he assured himself, he was very much in love; the girl was charming; she bewitched him with her bright eyes and her lovely face; and then, she was so very much in love with him, which was a soothing circumstance.

How pleasant home-life would be with such a delightful little companion! How well she would look at the head of his table! How

charmingly she would do the honours of the house! He would invite some of his brother-officers down to shoot—it would be quite safe—she had not eyes for anybody but him. How she would help him to improve the old home! Even in Sir Edward's lifetime they might do a great deal towards renovating it. They could plan so many improvements together, and——”

There was a slight movement beside him. He looked down, expecting to see the bright refreshing face of the girl who was occupying his thoughts, and beheld instead Judy, who, having come noiselessly across from the breakfast-table, was now standing near him by the window.

The sight of her at that moment came with a distressingly unpleasant shock. In the airy habitation he had been fashioning, he had provided no niche in which this poor little incubus could be conveniently deposited. The remembrance of her existence was out of keeping with his present train of thought; she was altogether so incongruous in the world

where he had been wandering—a world of roses and love and eternal sunshine, where came nothing unsightly nor inharmonious.

And yet, though happiness has its own peculiar phase of selfishness, it none the less fills the heart with a kindliness all its own. Out of the abundance of his own content, Hugh felt more than ever ready to be generous to this unfortunate little creature. He remembered with a passing sense of annoyance that she had on one or two occasions spoken disparagingly of Aline; but then she was so generally unaccountable and peculiar, it was absurd to pay much attention to her erratic remarks; she seemed to get on fairly well with Aline, and it must certainly be pleasanter to her that the future mistress of her old home would be a girl who was like her own sister, and not a stranger with whom she would have no past in common.

“Judy,” he began cautiously, “I don’t believe you have ever congratulated me on my engagement.”

Judy looked up quickly.

“Really?” she said. “Well, I am always a little confused as to whether an engagement is a subject for congratulation or condolence; but, if you prefer to be congratulated—by all means I congratulate you!”

“I should have thought you would have felt little doubt of my good fortune in the present case,” remarked Hugh, a slight vexation finding vent in his voice.

“I would sooner congratulate you than Aline,” said Judy, reflectively.

“Why so?”

“Because engagements are all very well, but they are so apt to end in matrimony; and, you see”—Judy screwed up her face into the caricature of a smile—“from a feminine point of view, man is so like fire—‘a good servant, but a bad master.’”

Hugh told himself that Judy’s would-be facetiousness was even more far-fetched and ill-timed than usual. He was determined not to smile, and, after a moment’s silence, continued seriously—

“However, Judy, you must be pleased at the turn events have taken from a personal point of view? Is it not pleasant to you to feel that, as I certainly consider myself in the position of your brother, you can look upon Aline as a genuine sister in the future?”

Judy was toying with the velvet curtain near which she stood. She lifted up the thick rich folds and placed them in different positions—now high, now low, now tight, now loose. She was apparently too absorbed in her occupation to attend to his question. Hugh, after a pause, still anxious to improve the opportunity, continued with tactless good-nature—

“You know you must always look upon my home as yours, Judy. We should certainly like you always to live with us. We should feel——”

The curtain swung heavily back from Judy’s nerveless fingers. She turned slowly to him with a look which startled him in her angry eyes.

“Your kind offer,” she said frigidly, “is a

trifle premature. At present you are a visitor in my home!"

Then, turning her back upon him, she walked from the room, and left him to give vent to his feelings in a whistle of surprise and dismay.

Judy's prognostic of the weather came true. About eleven o'clock rain began to fall heavily, and continued with steady plodding vigour, accompanied by sounds of distant thunder, until four in the afternoon, when the sky cleared and the sun shone forth upon a moist fragrant world. It was then too late to start for the Daltons', and Hugh suggested to Aline that they might as well employ the time till dinner in going for a row on the lake, Judy having decided to take a short walk with her father.

Accordingly, having waited for the ground to partially dry, they set forth. The air was cold and fresh after the rain, with more of autumn than summer in its breath. The

puddles lay like miniature lakes, reflecting the watery blue of the sky. At intervals the trees tossed their boughs and rid themselves of a spatter of drops, which they had apparently kept in reserve to facetiously shed upon any chance passer-by.

Aline, wrapping her fur-edged cloak closely about her, trod briskly over the heavy road. She wore the little scarlet cap, which had, as usual, slipped to one side of her head, and the soft tendrils of her hair waved and clung about the vivid hue which increased their fairness. On arriving at the bridge, she announced her intention of waiting there while Hugh went over the wet grass to the boat-house and rowed back to fetch her. He therefore hastened away, and in the course of a few moments, reappearing in the boat, assisted her into it, and arranged the cushions that she might sit facing him.

Then he began rowing energetically towards the north end of the lake, his gaze still bent upon the charming face opposite to him, with its arch, demure expression and its little white

neck, which peeped so prettily from the cosy ruffle of brown fur, till—finding that two soft cheeks, of which one is about to take a lifelong lease, are tantalizing to view at a distance, and that love, unlike faith, demands substantial criterion of its good things—he suggested it would be pleasanter to let the boat drift, and, laying down his oars, came near to Aline. Then, seating himself in the bottom of the boat at her feet, he rested his head on the cushion beside her, and resigned himself to the realization of her near presence and the delight of her caressing touch, while the boat drifted lazily on, sometimes propelled steadily forwards for a few yards by the imperceptible current which flowed towards the weir, then lagging all but motionless in mid-stream, or veering sideways towards the bank.

The lake was swollen, and the ripples upon its surface danced the boat up and down, and flecked the usually smooth water with crested ridges of mock billows. Nature, generally, had the appearance of being a trifle demoralized

—an air of restless expectancy, as though, her serenity once disturbed, she could not regain her former calm, but dreaded some repetition of what had aroused her. Over the entire country there brooded an atmosphere of change and unrest, which had introduced into its placid beauty some new element of stir and mystery. The trees upon the bank kept quivering noiselessly, and sending a shower of pattering drops into the water like some brief renewal of the storm. The Scotch cattle, with their shaggy coats all damp and bright from the rain, had collected near the water, and, neither browsing nor drinking, stood in little groups, staring vacantly before them with an anxious expression in their melancholy eyes. The air was now humid and close, now stirred with a chill restless breeze. About the horizon clung a bank of sullen clouds.

The boat drifted hither and thither on the water, and the conversation of the lovers drifted as rudderlessly from one topic to another, with the one underlying current of

love making headway throughout. The same senseless little speeches, the like infantine terms of endearment, all the quaint babble which Love teaches his puppets, were re-uttered as they have been spoken by scores of men and women caught in this same—what may we call it?—reason-annulling mesh of passion. The glances, the smiles, the caresses—all Love's dumb eloquence, was re-enacted, as it is eternally enacted wherever life and its strange complement of sex has sprung into being. But this same tender interpretation of Love, fraught with so much poetry, so much wealth of meaning to those who employ it, is apt to prove curiously pointless to the saner portion of the world—the portion who as yet await initiation at his hands, or who are endeavouring to forget his too vivid teachings.

“Hughie,” said Aline, suddenly (among his other eccentricities, Love has a liking for the production of inanities out of the most sonorous names), “I wish you would tell me—have you ever loved any one before you met me?”

Many women have asked men this question, and many men have found it embarrassing.

Hugh, as usual under the circumstances, temporized.

“There are many kinds of love, dearest,” he said, “that I could not explain to you. I have felt love in different forms, but never—that I can assure you—in its true beauty and power till now.”

“Judy says,” and Aline smiled, “that one may be a man’s last love, but to be his first—he must love one in his cradle !”

Hugh looked up at her face.

“Judy aspires to profound knowledge of the world,” he murmured. “It was only yesterday she informed me that, in each new love, man sees his ‘last,’ but death only decides when his vision shall be correct.”

Aline stroked his hair with a lingering touch.

“Tell me,” she said softly—“did you ever think you had met your ‘last’ before you knew me ?”

Again Hugh hesitated. Various episodes,

buried and forgotten, now stirred unpleasantly in their graves and threatened to come forth. With feelings of repulsion he viewed the array of dead faces, and one only did he invite the girl beside him to inspect, partly from expediency, partly because the grave wherein the dead love lay was reputable, and could boast a fair white tombstone with name and date writ legibly and boldly for the world to read.

"Yes," he said, "I was engaged to a girl out in India for a short time—barely three weeks. She was pretty, and I fancied myself very much in love with her at the time, but she played me a trick which cured my infatuation effectually."

"Tell me about it," said Aline, deeply interested.

"I will tell you the ins and outs of the case another time," he said. "This evening I am too contented to care to rake up disagreeable reminiscences, but the mere facts were as follows. The girl in question was the penniless daughter of a retired major, who, on her father's death, came out to live with her sister—the wife

of one of the fellows in my regiment. The fact of my being poor, although the reputed heir to a large property, gave rise to erroneous rumours of my future estate being deeply mortgaged, of heavy family debts, etc., and there was a pretty general impression—though at the time I was not aware of it—that in my case a rich wife was indispensable. The girl in question, consequently, seeing she had attracted my attention, and, I suppose, considering that, even though poor, I was more eligible than any one else she had a chance of entrapping, passed herself off as an heiress, and persuaded her sister to back her up in this manœuvre. Naturally I was not on the look-out for money, and, even had I been, should have proposed to no girl solely with a view to profiting by her income; but when I found out the fraud being practised on me, I broke off the engagement in disgust, and the girl's relations promptly gave out that I had proposed to her believing she had money, and, on finding out my mistake, had jilted her! It was very dis-

agreeable for me, but those of my friends who knew my circumstances in England, and that, as far as my future was concerned, money would be no object to me, while for the present my uncle had at any time agreed to give me sufficient income if I wished to marry, understood the fabrication."

For a few moments Aline made no comment upon his story; when she spoke there was something of solicitude in her voice.

"But she may not have deceived you from entirely mercenary motives—supposing that she cared for you so that at any price she could not bear to lose you?"

"That is most unlikely," said Hugh. "You judge others, dear, by the light of your own generous heart. But love, which for any price can drag itself in the dirt, must be worthless."

He felt rather proud of the sentiment expressed in this last remark, and repeated it to himself with private satisfaction.

Aline tightened her clasp of his hand.

“But—” she said, “if you had married her—?”

“I should not be here so contentedly with you, I imagine! My darling”—for she had grown quite pale—“why trouble yourself about what is over and done with—what was never very real to me? It is all buried now, dearest, as dead as though it had never lived its brief life, and what has taken its place is real and true and beautiful as the dead love never was. I am sorry I told you if it hurts you so to hear it, but you obliged me to do so.”

“Yes, yes,” agreed Aline; “it is best there should be no secrets between us.”

Hugh smiled again with the air of one who is soothing a frightened child.

“And so, sweet one, we will talk of the happy present and the happier future, and forget all the past before our lives became blended.”

But Aline, like Nature, seemed to have had her serenity ruffled and to have some difficulty in recovering it. As Hugh continued to talk at random on any subject which occurred to him under the belief that he was distracting her

attention, she still looked preoccupied and perturbed, till at last, half fretfully, she suggested they should go home.

“See how dark it is getting,” she said; “it must be late, and there is a damp mist rising till I am quite cold. Row me back to the bridge, Hugh, and then put up the boat as quickly as you can and we will walk home.”

In fact, the evening had closed in unusually early owing to the heavy clouds which were re-assembling over the face of the sky. Daylight seemed to be waning a full hour before the ordinary time; and although, near the water, the breeze which wandered over the lake had left the air clear and soft, above the damp grass, and especially in the sheltered hollows in the park, hung a white mist, rapidly spreading, and growing each moment more distinct.

Hugh somewhat reluctantly rose and resumed the oars. The boat had reached the utmost limit of the lake, being almost within dangerous proximity to the weir, and a considerable space of water lay between it and the

bridge from which it had originally drifted. As he rowed rapidly back through the gathering twilight, the breeze seemed to drop, and the mist came creeping stealthily to the very edge of the water, where it hovered and rose like a great white wall on either bank. Soon the bridge appeared in ghostly outline through the veil of fog, and Hugh, turning the boat landwards, moored it temporarily to the bank, and sprang ashore that he might help Aline to alight.

“I must just row back to the boat-house, dear,” he said. “I won’t be a minute. Will you wait for me as before on the bridge?”

“Yes—but be as quick as you can!” pleaded Aline with a shiver. “I am so cold, and it is getting so damp and horrid; I am sure it is going to rain again.”

Without waiting to discuss this debatable question, Hugh sprang back into the boat and rowed away with all possible speed. The boat-house lay the other side of the promontory which jutted out far across the lake, and this

was unfortunate, as it considerably lengthened the distance he had to go, which would have otherwise been but a few yards. He had just rounded the extreme point of the green slope, when a few ominous drops of rain fell, and, reflecting it was preferable to risk the boat being rained upon during one night than that Aline should be caught in the approaching storm, he hurriedly decided to row no further, but to content himself with mooring the boat quickly to the bank and leaving it in partial shelter under a thick tree.

Leaning over towards the land, he seized a chain which was lying on the grass, and drew himself to the bank; then springing ashore, he busied himself in endeavouring to fasten the rusty padlock through the staple of the boat. But this was no easy matter. The clasp of the padlock was so stiff he could not wrench it open, and as he stood fumbling with it, it broke away from the iron ring to which it was attached in a peculiarly irritating manner, and the chain fell down into the water. Hugh fished it out im-

patiently, and having succeeded in fastening the padlock to its ring, he once more attacked the obdurate clasp.

As he stood struggling to wrench it asunder, in a fever of annoyance at having to keep Aline waiting so much longer than he expected, he became alive to an impression that something had brushed lightly against him. It was as though the wind had blown some flimsy woman's attire about him with soft clinging touch. He could have fancied himself back in the boat with Aline beside him, and her cloak lifted by the breeze wrapping itself lightly about him.

He glanced round and saw, to his surprise, that behind him in the mist stood Aline herself, a look of distress—almost of fear, it seemed to him—in her pale face, and her eyes fixed on him with a peculiar expression, which seemed to make their brightness almost glassy.

“Aline!” he exclaimed remorsefully, “why have you come across this wet grass? Were you nervous left alone in the fog? Confound

this thing!" and he turned again to the wet chain. "I have been fumbling at it for the last ten minutes, it seems to me, with no result whatever! And, as the boat is a new one, I am afraid of leaving it to drift down the weir. However, wait a moment, and I'll settle it as best I can."

He stooped down again, and drawing the boat closer to the bank, flung the chain round one of the seats and proceeded to tie it in a clumsy knot.

"If this will keep fastened, it will prevent the boat drifting," he said; "and I will turn the cushions over in case it is a wet night. I am dreadfully sorry to have kept you waiting, but it was really not my fault."

Aline made no reply. He pushed the boat away to test whether it was securely fastened, and at the same moment there came to his ears the sound of a dull thud in the water near at hand, while through the dusk he perceived long circles rippling across the lake and stealthily chasing each other out of sight.

“That was a good-sized fish,” he observed carelessly, as he rose to his feet. “What sort of fellow should you guess him to be?” and he turned, expecting some comment from Aline, whose piscatorial interests he had reason to believe were strongly developed.

To his further surprise he now found she was no longer by his side. He peered through the mist and called her name softly, but there was no response, and, as far as it was possible to penetrate the combined forces of fog and twilight, he could perceive no trace of any human figure near at hand.

Somewhat startled, he made his way slowly along by the water, each moment expecting to hear a voice welcome him, and see a figure emerge from the clinging dampness to meet him. But as neither sight nor sound gave token of the girl who had a moment before been at his side, he became perplexed. Could she have been so unreasonably put out with him for having kept her waiting, that she had started for home without warning him of her intention?

It was so unlike Aline to exhibit such petty temper, that he dismissed the idea as absurd. Increasing his speed, he strode away from the promontory, and, as he again approached the bridge, to his relief he descried the faint indication of a figure leaning over the parapet.

Almost simultaneously Aline's voice came pleasantly to his ears.

"So here you are!" she cried. "I thought you were never coming!"

"It was partly your fault, dear, that I was so long," said Hugh, advancing quickly to take the two little hands she extended to him as she ran down to meet him. "I delayed, looking about for you near the boat-house. I did not think you had come back to the bridge."

"Come back to the bridge?" repeated Aline, looking at him in unfeigned astonishment. "What do you mean? I told you where you would find me, and I have never left here."

Hugh laughed.

“ You clever little humbug ! ” he said. “ I am sorry to disappoint you, but I am afraid you can’t trick me into believing that ! ”

“ Hugh, what do you mean ? ” reiterated Aline, now looking up at him with such astonishment depicted on her face, that he could scarcely believe it to be otherwise than genuine.

“ Simply this,” he answered more gravely. “ You were standing close to me when I was at the boat-house. I spoke to you, explaining what had delayed me, and asking you to wait for me. When I had succeeded in fastening the boat to the bank I looked for you, and you were nowhere to be seen.”

Aline’s eyes seemed to be expanding with a sudden horror.

“ Did you hear me speak to you ? ” she inquired, catching hold of his arm, as though afraid he might leave her.

“ No, I did not,” admitted Hugh. “ I spoke to you three times, and you gave me no answer. As you were close beside me, and

must have heard what I said, I thought you more than usually uncivil!"

But Aline held him with a look of growing terror on her face which he could no longer imagine was assumed.

"Oh, you have seen Aline Davies' ghost!" she whispered, coming closer to him till he could feel her shivering. "Oh, take me away from here, Hugh! I am so frightened! It is all so horrible—horrible!"

"Hush, hush, my darling!" said Hugh, putting his arm about her and trying to soothe her. "I never saw Aline Davies, and don't know what her ghost should be like. But what I saw just now was you, sweet! Your eyes, your hair, your own dear face; only I thought you looked scared—as you are looking now. What can be the explanation of it? Did you never leave the road and come to look for me?"

"Oh, don't!" cried Aline, hiding her face against his arm as though to stop any further description. "Other people have seen her. I

know so well what it is. Oh, take me away! Be quick and take me away before she comes back!"

"This is folly, dear," said Hugh, gently, leading her away over the bridge. "Listen! My imagination must have tricked me in this. Can't you understand that, as I have you in my eyes, in my heart, in my brain, nothing is more likely than that your image should take shape through my imagination? Or see," he continued, growing convinced by the force of his own eloquence, "another explanation of it! The girl I saw seemed to me to resemble you; but it was a resemblance such as one may see of a beloved face in dreams. Though this did not strike me at the time, I realize it now. I seemed to see her pale, whereas you are usually rosy; she had hungry, unpleasant eyes, unlike your merry ones; and—the fog may have wrapped her about—but, as far as I can recall what I saw in that momentary glance, her dress looked light and flimsy; not a warm soft brown like the one you are wearing. It must

have been some village girl, and when I looked round and saw her through the fog—knowing that I had kept you waiting an unreasonable time, and with you very much on my mind—what more natural than that I should fancy I saw you arrived to scold me?”

But, in spite of his arguments, Aline continued strangely unnerved and hysterical.

“Don’t let us talk about it!” she pleaded, and he could feel her still trembling in his arms. “You will only make it so much worse. Let us be quick and get back to the lights and warmth!”

And she hurried along with an unreasoning fear still depicted upon her face, and her hand nervously clasping his.

“This beautiful external nature, these still waters, these majestic hills, I have not been worthy of them. Where was the peace of mind, where the greatness and tranquillity . . . which all nature symbolizes? Not in me! not in me! or only for an instant. On my best hours such little thoughts, such little cares, intruded. I have flowed weak as water. Any straw could turn me. A jest, a look, a laugh, has thrown trouble into my soul; a pain, a lassitude, a sick and morbid feeling, has changed the current of a whole philosophy.

“We would be gazing, upward and around, at some divine spectacle—gazing with calm and dilated souls—and lo! there is ever some thorn in the sandal we must first stoop to extract.”—THORNDALE.

CHAPTER VII.

“JUDY,” said Aline, “I want to order a new evening-dress. What colour do you advise? I have been thinking and thinking this afternoon, but I cannot decide what would be best. You see,” she added, with a little blush, “I want something which is specially becoming! When there is somebody who cares much about one, it is quite strange how anxious it makes one to look one’s best.”

“Quite strange!” acquiesced Judy, with an all but imperceptible smile. “I may say the change in your case is really remarkable! But”—she leant her head back against the heap of newly-mown grass in which she was sitting, and stared up at the sky—“at present there

are no colours in the world for me but a glorious unfathomable blue or a dazzling vapoury white—unless I include the green of the foliage where I see it trembling against the sky.” She turned lazily round. “Yet no! there is a grey over there, a pallid blending of the vivid blue and white, and yonder is a cloud tinged with pink. Wait till sunset-time, then there will be endless suggestions in the sky.”

“But, my dear Judy,” said Aline, from the neighbouring heap of grass, “blue never did suit me; and I have several whites—all of them a trifle messy now—but I don’t want to get another. Grey is a great deal too old for me; and as for green—think what the green of the foliage would be for a dress! Hideous! Do be practical. Whatever colours one sees in the sky and in Nature generally, one cannot cut off a bit to send to a shop as a pattern.”

“No more can you cut a pattern off my imagination,” said Judy, still gazing at the depth of dazzling atmosphere overhead. “I am a bad person to consult on practical sugges-

tions for dress. When I try to picture clothes I should really like, I find I have transformed my common everyday acquaintances into mediæval princes and princesses, and clothed them in gorgeous garments not at all suitable to this tight-fitting tailor-made age!" She sat up and brushed some of the grass off her dress. "Oh, the portion of our surroundings which we ourselves fashion is so frightful, Nel! I should like to live in a world where everything had been made pictorial; where there was a suggestion of poetry in the houses we built, in the clothes we wore; where everyday existence might lend itself to the production of the like exquisite pictures Nature is always presenting to us. Surely even ugliness, so-called, properly dealt with, would exist as such no more, but would assume its true position in the general order of things as the *grotesquely picturesque*—merely a something giving variety and force to an otherwise monotonously smiling picture, just as Nature's wildness and gruesomeness gives contrast and tone to her phases of quiet

loveliness, while both are magnificent in their way. Oh, I should like to reconstruct the world we have made on a new pattern, and try if, by banishing the ugliness from our external surroundings, we did not banish some of the ugliness from our own hearts at the same time!"

"Really, Judy, you are hopeless when you ramble on like this!" said Aline, stirring impatiently amongst her heap of sweet-scented grass. "Let us come back to my dress. Now, what do you advise?"

"I can't bring my thoughts to bear on anything half so serious at present," said Judy. "Nature has whirled me up into a misty dreamland of clouds and fancies, and you must leave me there for a little space. My brain is intoxicated with golden lights and purple shadows, with tremulous air and drifting clouds. When I am removed from the magic of this afternoon, I shall grow sane, and give you my undivided attention."

The mowing-machine at the further end of

the lawn paused, and the patient fat donkey rested momentarily from his labour of cutting and drawing behind him fodder which, could his thoughts have soared to such heights, must have appeared to him food fragrant and sweet enough for the gods. The little pile of chopped grass was emptied on the lawn, forming another sweet mound, and the pleasant hum of the machine was once more resumed.

“How,” continued Judy, meditatively, “the little private bit of nature in us vibrates weakly with Nature as a whole! How our emotions, our thoughts, our desires, change with the moods of Nature! Now, this is a day which has the effect of making me feel very good. I feel so poetical, so pure; my organism is filled with a most restful saintliness; beautiful fancies come drifting like clouds across my brain. And, at other times, I have been positively aghast at the depths of latent wickedness in me!”

“Judy!” exclaimed Aline, with startled remonstrance.

“Oh, don’t be alarmed,” said Judy; “the depths are latent, I assure you! Nothing has come to stir them up. But Aline, look at the sky. Do you see the atmosphere palpitating and quivering against its own wealth of blue? Can’t you picture the soul as some delicate essence trembling between heaven and earth, sensitive to a million varied influences which waft it hither and thither and transpose the nature of its being? Poor frail essence!” she said softly; “how is one to shield it from disturbance, and avoid the atmospheric changes to which it is subject?”

She paused; then, after a moment’s silence, spoke more quickly—

“Tell me—an atmospheric change may be supposed to have taken place in your soul lately—tell me your experiences under the circumstances.”

Aline gave a little bored sigh.

“What are you talking about?” she inquired. “Do you mean getting engaged, when you talk of ‘atmospheric changes and disturbances’?”

“Not precisely,” said Judy; “not precisely ‘getting engaged.’ I meant love. It is a subject I know so little about, and which interests me. You can, perhaps, explain to me something of what it means.”

Aline looked round as though suspicious of an intention on Judy’s part to make game of her. But the face she beheld upon the adjacent grass-heap was serious and interested. Looking at it, she found herself momentarily speculating what place it would occupy in the world of ‘pictorial beauty’ Judy herself craved. Would it rank amongst the grotesquely picturesque? Really, when one came to think of it, would one not have imagined that a nature with Judy’s strong appreciation of the beautiful must feel all the more keenly being denied personal beauty? And yet was not Judy marvellously self-satisfied? Aline, in her turn, smiled slightly as she inquired—

“What is it you want me to tell you?”

“Well, tell me how this afternoon affects you. You feel happy, I believe. You have

been watching the distant view with a dreamy expression on your face, not at all usual to it. Now and then a smile has hovered about your lips. Until you interrupted my reflections with the question about your dress, I fancied your spirit was amongst the gorse on the moors, with a figure in grey tweed familiar to both of us. What have you been feeling while we both lay here?"

"How odd you are!" said Aline, sprinkling a handful of grass upon her lap, and watching it dropping through her fingers, while the puzzled expression lingered upon her face. "I don't think the afternoon affects me specially. It is very bright and pleasant, and I suppose I feel fairly happy; but, on the other hand, it is uneventful, and"—this in a tone of annoyance—"I wish Hugh had not gone out shooting!"

"Do you feel that you can't be happy away from him now?" asked Judy, turning sideways that she might see the pretty perplexed face which was lazily watching her own.

The soft colour again rushed over Aline's clear skin.

"Perhaps!" she said, turning her head away shyly. "And as to what I feel—well, I am happy—yes, very! Life seems to have grown into something very good and precious. It is a wonderful feeling that there is some one who thinks me the truest, most beautiful, most perfect creature in the world. It makes me so want to be it!"

There was silence for a few moments. A spruce black crow alighted upon the lawn, and viewing the two human figures who were so unusually still and silent, hopped cautiously nearer, watching them with bright inquisitive eyes.

"And yet," continued Judy, after a time, "I have studied love in books and in my little world yonder," and she nodded towards the village on the distant hill, "and though I have found what I admired in books, love, as I have seen it in real life, disappointed me. In men it was mere passion, in girls mere sentiment;

the maturer love of married life was a species of mechanical affection, a plodding conscientious habit of do-my-duty-by-you. Love in its purest and most ideal form was bred of pain"—her eyes seemed looking far into the distance—"and then out of the material and unlovely was evolved what was divine and exquisite; it reminded me of a flower, which, growing towards Heaven and taking its colour from the skies, made one marvel how from the dingy soil which gave it birth so fair and stainless a thing could have crept."

Aline was silent, watching the crow, who, having decided that human beings who could, after all, talk like the rest of their kind were no more to be trusted, was now hopping away across the lawn like a creature on springs.

"I don't quite follow you," she said at last. "If you are talking of blighted affections, they always make people sour. "I don't know anything which makes one feel so good in one's inmost self as happiness. To me any sort of sorrow seems to crush all the good in me."

“So I have thought,” said Judy; “and yet—did I not tell you this afternoon has made me unusually saintly?—it seems to me that I was considering a matter-of-fact, sheep-and-cow-sort of happiness—very precious, no doubt, in its way, but containing only some dull spark of the ideal. I suppose it is a mere truism to say that a storm which can crush us, does press us down into what is earthly and so begrime us, but that the same storm bravely weathered buoys up all that is fine in us. The grandest love I came across in real life was also the saddest. Aline Davies was a splendid creature.”

Aline sat up upon her heap of grass and brushed the fair hair out of her eyes. There was something of protest not only in the action itself, but in the accompanying glance which she directed towards Judy. The latter, however, was studying the clouds, and did not see it.

“She was a woman who, had she but loved a good man, would have loved him with a rare affection, at once passionate and ideal. But—it

is an erratic rule of Fate—such women rarely love good men.”

“I wish you would drop the subject of that girl, once for all!” exclaimed Aline, her lips white with suppressed annoyance. “The subject is scarcely likely to be agreeable to me; and, as for the girl herself, I think she was shameless and horrible. Possibly you would maintain she was really extremely nice-minded!”

“It is a point on which I am no judge,” said Judy, quietly. “But”—and her voice waxed slightly indignant—“why, with your petty one-sided judgment, pronounce her blamable for being human? She was wronged and unfortunate, and when she awoke suddenly to the discrepancy between the animal and the ideal, she sacrificed her young beautiful life to save her purity of soul. The action may be open to criticism, but the motive is above it.”

Aline took up her book and resolutely glued her eyes to its pages. In as far as attitude can convey an idea, the expression of her back announced that she was obstinately determined

to end a conversation which was not at all to her liking.

Judy, leaving her own book unopened, looked once more up at the sky. The blue overhead was brilliant in intensity. As she gazed, its depth seemed to grow more immeasurable. Clouds floated across its surface like white-sailed ships on a waveless ocean. Against the clear distance, the sunlit vapour wreathed itself into curious shapes and quaint semblances of things earthly.

What a fantastic, ever-changing world lay pictured in that blue dome! Near the horizon was a bank of clouds like frowning mountains with snow-capped summits; in their midst was a shadowy blue castle with pointed battlements and a streak of light like a river of clear grey flowing past it. Now one of the battlements had lengthened, and become an armed warrior, holding a banner and surveying the blue-and-white landscape, which must have assuredly presented many alarming objects to his gaze. Another moment, and his banner had floated

away from its staff, and his own uncouth figure, rapidly enlarging, out-topped the mountains, while the castle melted from beneath him. Then, as he grew wider and more disjointed, he assumed the guise of an enormous poodle, who stood barking at a flock of sheep—represented by a group of white clouds which came hurrying past. Again, the poodle had disappeared—its head and legs floating off with charming independence from its body and tail—and the fleecy vapours had become the wings of little seraphs peeping down with pardonable curiosity at this queer old earth, while, in the distance, a bank of lowering clouds seemed suggestive of evil spirits lying in wait to pounce upon the little truants from the courts of Paradise.

Judy found a wonderful fascination in the fantastic imagery of the sky, with its mixture of the grotesque and the sublime, its caricatures of earth and its suggestions of heaven. She could frame endless pictures for herself out of the clouds; they led her on through a maze of drifting thoughts, till, dreamy and entranced,

she felt uplifted from her surroundings and forgot a world of facts in a world of fancies.

Was life itself something vague and incomprehensible as that clear space of blue outstretched overhead? Were the emotions which could stir its depths and blot out its brightness, transient and unreal as those vapoury clouds flying so lightly through the deep ether? Would they take other shape as swiftly, and pass away into shadowy Space, leaving no trace of their brief passage through the eternal changeless blue? Who could tell?

She gazed hungrily at the cloud-world as though to grasp its evanescence—its spirit of restlessness which held for her a promise of rest. Then she turned her eyes from the dazzling expanse of sky to the darker earth beneath. Here, again, after the bright shifting vapour, did not this still world image forth the changeless calm of eternity, above which human dreams and desires drift—light and fleeting as the vapoury clouds?

There were moorland lights and shadows on

the hills to-day. They came stealing down over the face of the country—the shade falling softly over trees, and lake, and the red-and-white houses of the village, then vanishing before the dancing sunlight which chased it swiftly and bathed the country in a golden gleam.

The clearness of autumn was in the air. Here and there the trees showed branches of pale gold and brown. A copper beech amongst the greener foliage of the elms was a dull burnished red. Summer was dying—but bravely, brightly; dying with dancing lights, and whispered memories of the days which were past, rather than forebodings of the chill grey days to come.

As the sunlight lay upon the distance, the bare brown of the moorland showed with its spaces of pink heather; then the shadow swept over it, bathing it a dusky purple; now, the village looked distinct—its windows gleaming in the sunlight, its orchards outlined with red walls, even the passion-flowers and scarlet creepers upon the houses showing in patches

of brilliant colour—next, plunged into a dusky shade, in which houses, trees, and colours were blended together in shadowy vagueness; nearer still, up the road through the park moved a gaily-painted cart, its red and blue at one moment gaudy in the sunlight, and, clearly visible, a woman in a pink dress sitting upon the shafts, and turning at intervals to speak to a man who walked beside her, in slouched hat and weather-stained garments; then the shadow swept past, making them distant and indistinct, dulling the gay colours of the cart and the bright pink of the woman's dress.

There are days when even the idea of pain seems clothed with a mystic glamour. As the unsubstantial cloud-world seemed to uplift Judy above the actuality of life and its surroundings, so the mellow beauty of this lower world was soothing and restful. Her face bore an unwonted look of contentment as she lay with her cheek upon the grass, silently watching the lights and shadows while they swept softly over the land.

After a while, Aline looked up from her book, and, glancing round, continued the previous conversation abruptly, as though she had been still pursuing it in her mind during her silence.

“Love is very odd,” she said sentimentally; “the way one goes through life meeting numbers of people who affect one no more than a passing breath of wind, till suddenly, out of the crowd, steps some one, the tone of whose voice, the touch of whose hand, has a different meaning to all the rest, so that life can never be the same again! It is so wonderful!”

Judy turned to look once more up at the clouds.

“And supposing,” she said — “supposing that something more strange happened—that you met this being you describe, and felt him all you say, an isolated specimen; but he, on his part, recognized in you only one of the crowd! What then?”

Aline studied the neatly cropped grass before her with a thoughtful expression.

"I don't know," she said. "But if Hugh had not loved me first, I can't imagine I should have loved him. There seems something—well—immodest in a girl's taking the initiative in love."

The passing sunshine was bright. Judy bent her hat lower over her eyes.

"Ah, well," she remarked lightly, "it seems to me as if love should be most beautiful when it gives without taking, and serves knowing it will never be served."

Then she laughed, and her tone grew still more mocking.

"It seems to me, too, according to modern notions, that the first thing a *really nice-minded* girl should do, on developing any symptoms of this complaint, is to walk off in one direction and send the man she loves flying in another. If the man loves her, presumably he picks himself up and comes after her; if not, she must go on her way, and never so much as turn her head in his direction. But why, Nel? it is so quaint! Why

is there a generally received theory that it is a disgrace to a woman to love a man until he has politely intimated to her his wish that she may do so? I suppose it is a lingering remnant of barbarism, when Man chose and Woman had no voice in the matter; now, the right of refusal has been accorded to Woman, but an equal right of choice is still viewed with horror. If her heart should transgress this social law, she must summon all the dissimulation of which her nature is capable to aid her in concealing it. And yet, again—*why*? If love is something to be ashamed of, it is equally blamable under all circumstances. If not, why is a girl, whose love is usually so far more pure and less material than man's love, forced to regard it in the light of a disgrace? Why also is not an unhappy love to receive the same amount of sympathy from the world at large as other forms of bereavement? Tell me, Nellie; I am so ignorant!"

"My dear Judy"—Aline sat up and closed

her book with a little air of superiority and importance—"I understand *why* most thoroughly, but I scarcely know how to explain it to you. Woman's natural instinct of modesty is to hide her love; and the world in general, recognizing this, holds her blamable if she departs from it. When her love is reciprocated——"

"Stop!" exclaimed Judy. "Remember what you term 'natural instincts' are merely inherited remnants of former social customs. Now go on."

But Aline rose up and shook the grass from her dress.

"You put one's ideas to flight!" she said in an aggrieved tone, stretching her arms above her head and giving a suppressed yawn.

Just then from out of the house came two footmen, one bearing a tea-table, the other carrying the shining silver kettle and its stand. They placed the table in a sheltered spot near the house, and, having covered it with a snowy cloth, proceeded to journey backwards and forwards till they had spread upon it a tempt-

ing array of food—tea-cakes, bread-and-butter, two glass dishes of jam, and, what immediately brought a contingent of wasps upon the scene, a plateful of ripe ruddy peaches.

Aline stood silently watching them. Her hands were clasped behind her fair head, her hat was lying on the grass at her feet. She looked very childlike, with the bored aggrieved expression about her little soft mouth. As the footmen retired, she picked up her hat, and, with another yawn, began strolling towards the house. Then suddenly her step quickened, her face became transfused with a marvellous gladness.

“Hugh!” she exclaimed triumphantly, and the next moment was being enfolded in a pair of strong arms and devoured by a pair of eager loving eyes; for Hugh had quietly emerged from the drawing-room, having, for some reason best know to himself, returned from shooting fully a couple of hours before the rest of the party.

Judy lay very still upon the grass.

Aline's face was flushed with a radiant happiness. As Hugh sat down on a wicker chair near the tea-table, she perched herself upon the arm, and rested her hand tenderly upon his shoulder. They remained thus talking, engrossed in each other's presence, unmindful of any fact save that a happy world contained them both, and that they asked no more of Fate than the satisfaction of each other's society.

After a time, the purple shadow again swept over the land, and, creeping up from the park, shrouded the lawn, the terraces, the beech trees in its dusky shade. But the sunlight still rested upon the house, and fell in its mellow brightness upon the two figures, who seemed thus emblematically enwrapped in some gladness denied to the surrounding world.

At length Judy rose up with a grim little smile upon her face.

"Sentiment and Passion!" she said; "and meanwhile the kettle is boiling over on to the grass!"

“ Trouble is to love what night is to a star.”

MALLOCK.

CHAPTER VIII.

HUGH had more than once complained that country life was a prolonged five-o'clock tea. Certainly tea at Lilcot was apt to prove a lengthy meal, and that evening, as the small group lingered over the fascinations of the wicker table, the shadows lengthened and the sunlight waned. The sky grew clear with the clearness of sunset, and conversation, which till then had been brisk and unflagging, seemed gradually to hush beneath the spell of the evening hour. From time to time the eyes of the lovers met with a glance or a smile which said what words might have marred, while, in the silence which had fallen, there came from the park the ceaseless murmur of the water

where it fell over the weir, and the faint chime of the bell ringing for evensong in the far-away misty tower of the church. Near at hand, the kettle continued to hiss forth a feeble ebullition of its past wrath, and the wasps buzzed excitedly round the remains of the fruit and rich crimson jam.

At length Aline rose and, stepping on to the grass, stood where the fresh clear breeze stealing round the house could reach her. She lifted off her hat and again let the air wander with crisp breath through the waving tangles of her hair.

“Hugh,” she said, “it is growing cold now ; let us have a stroll down the park.”

Hugh rose up obediently.

“You said I was to remind you that you were to get some flowers to wear this evening. Shall we go to the hothouses first and choose them ?”

Then he turned to Judy with a very successful attempt at cordiality.

“Won’t you come too ?” he added.

Judy promptly shook her head.

“I shall wait and see if father comes back late for some tea—he might do so,” she answered.

“Which reminds me,” exclaimed Hugh, “that Dick sent a special message to beg you would keep some tea for him, in case he had time to come back here to fetch his horse which he left this morning. He said he should come if he could, and ride home; but, of course, if it was late when he left the moors, he would be obliged to go straight back by train. I was quite forgetting to tell you.”

After they had strolled away, Judy remained for some time sitting quietly in the chair, with her hands folded in her lap. At length she rose up, and, lifting the hissing kettle off its stand, extinguished the small blue flame which had been the cause of its disquietude, and crept back to the little heap of grass where she had been sitting before tea. A clump of bushes sheltered it from the breeze; it was warm there, even without the sunshine which had passed away.

She laid herself down, and once more leant

her head back against the soft mound. The donkey had been taken away to enjoy the reward of labour in a field where he might crop and dispose of the grass by a method more in keeping with his views. The pleasant hum of the machine had ceased, and the clanging of the distant bell had also died away into silence. The universal hush was broken only by an occasional chirping amongst the trees overhead, or the startled cry of a bird as it flew swiftly across the lawn, seeking refuge from some unknown terror.

Again Judy gazed at the distance with a dreamy light in her eyes. The sunshine still lay upon the hills, and the spire of the church was gold with its lingering touch, while the building itself looked shadowy and unreal as the cloud-castle which had long since drifted away.

Within those misty walls—so like a grey vapour which some faint breath of wind might disperse—human beings were now on their knees before their Creator, pouring out

their heart-sorrows and seeking a Divine—or was it an imaginary?—relief. What sharp griefs had those worn-out old village crones and those hard-featured ploughmen to dispel from their souls? Ah, the space from earth to heaven is so small to the untutored mind, that no sigh is too insignificant, no whisper too faint, to reach the ears of the Almighty Listener. Now Judy closed her eyes. A longing stole upon her to be within those quiet walls—with the high dim arches, the mystic light pierced by one long shaft of sunshine, the jewelled hues from the window staining the pale altar, the sense of a hallowed calm, of shelter from the world and its weariness.

The still evening about her was, in itself, lovely; the sky was slowly becoming dyed with the first faint tints of sunset; there was a soothing rustle of wind among the leaves overhead; but into the beauty had crept a sense of haunting pain, as some grief of the waking world may echo through the mazes of a pleasant dream.

Does love attain its rare ideal only in the clean heart of a woman, bred there of some scorching passion and purified by a fierce sorrow—an offspring of folly reared by pain? In this world is the Highest possible only through sharpest suffering?

Gradually the thoughts tormenting her brain craved some distinct expression. Drawing a pencil from her pocket, she opened the book which had been lying near her upon the grass, and began writing inside the cover.

As her pencil moved rapidly over the paper, daylight faded about her, and when at length she paused, it was with difficulty she could trace the words she had written in the deepening twilight.

“LOVE’S JEWEL.

“Love flew to and fro over the earth, but his rose-hued wings drooped languidly, and his blue eyes were sorrowful.

“‘I come from Paradise,’ he said—‘Paradise whose courts are paved with jewels so bright

they might blind all save angels, yet not in Heaven itself can I find the perfect Jewel of Love;’ and he sighed as he flew on his way.

“Then a little lark fluttered past him. ‘O Love!’ she carolled, as she rose high into the blue sky, ‘with the heart’s first throb, into it you drop a bright sharp stone. That is the divine Love-germ; in the soft heart it shines and hurts, and some day you hope to return and find it fashioned into a gleaming priceless gem. Alas, that only woe and anguish can so change it! This I know, for the clouds have told me, and they see all that passes on earth.’

“And the lark sped on her upward flight, but her song sounded less joyous, and in her voice was a new note of pain. It is ever thus with those who have looked on Love.

“The young God smiled thoughtfully to himself; he went on his way more quickly.

“Then a voice called to him from the fields beneath, and, looking down, he beheld a beautiful beggar maiden. A dark kerchief covered her shining hair, and a coarse robe

hid her white limbs; but he knew that he had seen her in Paradise.

“‘Who are you?’ Love cried, as he flew downwards; and the beggar raised her pale face, and looked at him with deep earnest eyes, till he felt awed beneath her glance.

“‘I am Faith,’ she answered; ‘and though here on earth men deem me poor and foolish, in Paradise I am the wisest of all God’s angels. I know what you seek, and in this world alone can you find it.’

“Then the Love-God gazed at her in wonder. ‘Maiden,’ he said, ‘it is useless seeking this Jewel on earth. I have looked for it far and wide in the hearts of mortals, but nowhere can I see it. I looked into the hearts of lovers in the first flush of passion, as they wandered murmuring words of madness in the pale moonlight, but the Love-stone within them burnt with a fierce unsteady gleam, and I soon flew away. I looked into the hearts of the bridegroom and bride as they stood at the altar, breathing, in the hush and calm of the holy

building, a lifelong vow, but, though the Love-stone shone clear and bright in their hearts, it was as yet brittle as glass, and untried by Time and Sorrow. Then I looked into the heart of a wife who loved her husband well. The Jewel within her glowed with a warm true light, but care had sullied its brightness, and petty trouble dimmed the fulness of its beauty. Nowhere could I find the pure divine light of the perfect Love-jewel, and now I have sought amongst the gems of Paradise in vain.'

"Then Faith smiled. 'The little bird was wise, O Love!' she said. 'Come with me, and I will show you what you seek.'

"She rose into the air, and, taking his hand, they flew away together. On over the earth they passed, and the toil-worn mortals looked up at them and smiled. Around them, as they went, hovered Eternal Sunshine, but ever before them was a pale mist, and behind them darkness blacker than night.

"They flew over a noisy city, and on beyond

the city they came to a quiet hillside. There Faith paused. On the hillside was a group of fair girls gathering flowers. They danced and sang as they wreathed long bright garlands, and the sound of their laughter floated softly upwards to the ears of Love. Swiftly he fitted a sharp-barbed arrow in his bow, but Faith stayed his hand.

“‘Let them laugh a little longer, O cruel God,’ she said, ‘and look at what I brought you hither to see.’

“Then Love glanced about him, and saw that to the right on the hill lay a graveyard. A high wall parted it from the sunny slope where the girls were dancing, but one maiden had wandered away, had crossed the wall, and now stood alone in that Garden of the Dead. Yet the sound of her laughter was gayer than that of the rest, and her song rose clear and sweet above theirs.

“And her companions called to her—‘What are you doing away beyond that high wall? We cannot see you, but how merry you are!’

“And the girl made answer—‘Here grow flowers more beautiful than any you have found. I am gathering them in handfuls, and I am so happy I must needs sing!’

“But Love saw that in the shadow of the wall she was only digging a wide black grave.

“Then Faith said, ‘Tell me what the maiden is doing.’

“Love answered, ‘I see her burying Youth, Joy, and Hope—nay! all the beauty and fairness of Life; but she sings and laughs that her companions may never know.’

“And great burning tears fell from the girl’s eyes; but the faster she wept the more merrily she sang.

“And Faith said, ‘Look again.’

“So Love flew over the wall down into the graveyard. The air there was damp and chill, and he shivered, for the sunlight, which ever hovered around him, now grew pale and cold.

“He looked into the heart of the girl, and he saw that it throbbed slowly and wearily; it was no longer warm and rosy like the heart

of a young maiden; and when he looked closer he found it was dead and grey, save in one place, where was a great red wound. From the wound slowly welled out the life-blood, drop by drop; and when Love saw that, he laughed aloud. Though he is so fair, he is very cruel.

“‘See!’ he cried, ‘how straight and true I shoot! That red wound is where my poisoned arrow once flew; the hurt can never heal, the heart is numb and broken.’

“And, as he spoke, the girl’s song ceased, her tired hands dropped to her side; she fell forward and lay there, silent and dead, at his feet.

“Then Faith stooped down, and drew the poor bruised heart out of the still breast.

“‘Take it!’ she called to Love; and Love uttered a great cry, for lo! there in the gaping red wound lay a gem which shone and flashed with a beauty such as he had never dreamed. It was the perfect Love-Jewel.

“‘See!’ said Faith, ‘Perfectness grows out

of Imperfection, and divinest beauty has its root in folly.'

"And the eyes of Faith and Love met as they stood beside the dead girl.

* * * * *

"Afar over the hills the evening shadows crept, a hush had sunk on all around; the girls were gone homeward singing; they had forgotten their companion when they no longer heard her merry voice, and they had wandered away bearing their drooping flower-burdens through the grey twilight.

"By-and-by men came, and buried the girl in the grave she had dug with her own hands.

"But Love flew away with the shining Jewel, and he met the lark dropping downwards to her nest.

"‘See,’ he cried joyfully, ‘I have found it! In all the Courts of Paradise I looked for it in vain. The Love-gem, in its purest beauty, shines only in the broken heart of a woman.’”

Slowly Judy closed the book and laid it in

her lap. As she looked up, it seemed to her that a great wave of darkness had swept over the country, while the sky had absorbed all the brightness departed from the earth.

Then a heavy step sounded on the gravel, and a strong cheerful voice broke upon her ears.

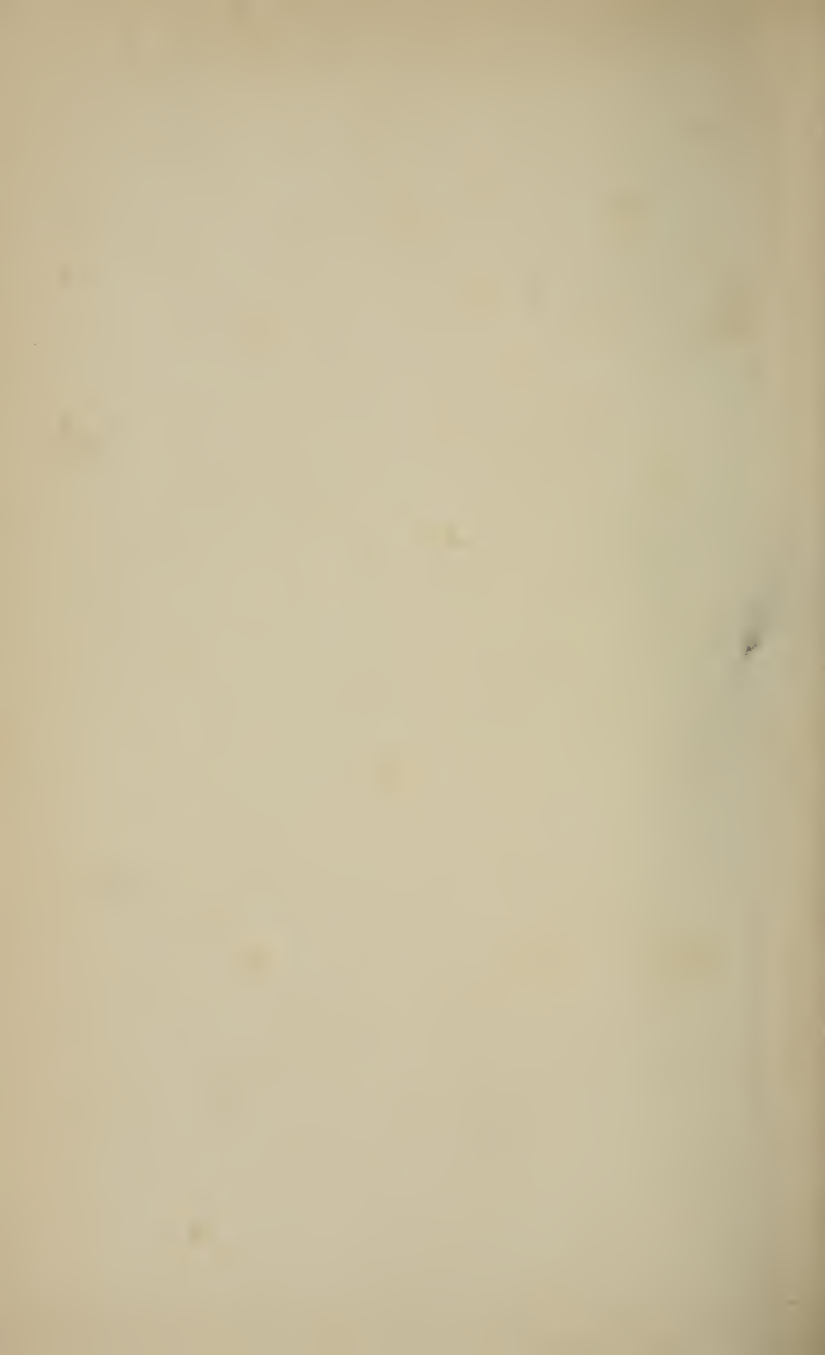
“Judy! alone in the gloaming! What are you meditating upon now?”

Judy sprang up.

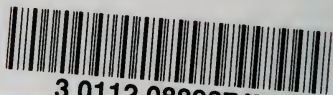
“Dick!” she exclaimed, “so you have come!” Then she stooped to pick up the book which had dropped on to the grass. “I was meditating, Dick,” she said lightly, “that, when I was a child, I had quite decided there must be some material mistake in the Book of Genesis.” She moved away to the table, and re-lit the flame beneath the kettle, while she looked back at him and laughed. “I believed that this world had been planned by the devil in a fit of malicious mischief; that afterwards, Providence, with supreme kindness, grieving over what was no fault of His own, had taken

the trouble to evolve something divine out of the devil's handicraft; but, fundamentally, the world was not the work of a good God, but bore too strong evidence of having had a horned-and-hoofed originator. Dick"—and there was a sudden pathos in her voice—"it was a satisfactory theology, as far as it went; it explained so much!"

END OF VOL. II.



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